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Stephen King's THE SHINING



Volume 28 Number 11



**JON VOIGHT ON
"ANACONDA"**

**ANIMATING MTV'S
"AEON FLUX"**

**DEAN KOONTZ
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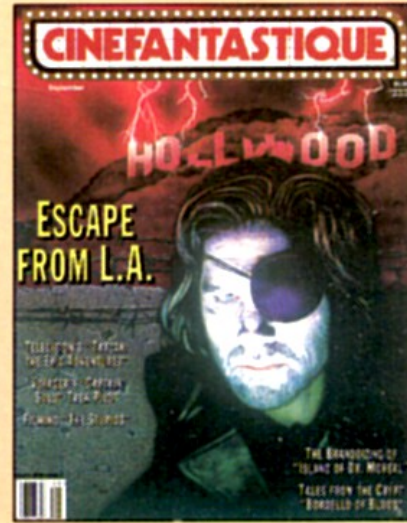
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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

MAY 1997

For Stephen King fans in 1980, Stanley Kubrick's *THE SHINING* was largely a big disappointment. For those who hadn't savored the book, it was far more satisfying, boasting some of the most kinetic camerawork ever captured on film and featuring a performance from Jack Nicholson that cemented his position as one of film's finest actors. But unlike Brian DePalma's *CARRIE*, which was an improvement on King's book, Kubrick's *THE SHINING*—whatever its merits—could only be considered a betrayal of King's material. Now King himself has decided to do cinematic justice to one of his finest works. As King of the horror best-seller, the novelist has also become King of the television mini-series, giving him the clout to mount *THE SHINING* as a four-hour mini-series for ABC, to air in May.

For horror fans, King's mini-series is as eagerly anticipated as was Kubrick's high-profile feature film. Our cover story on its making features an interview with King, who adapted his own book and served as executive producer to insure his vision reaches the screen this time. Also interviewed are director Mick Garris, who collaborated successfully with King on ABC's massive adaptation of *THE STAND*, and Garris' wife Cynthia, who endures prosthetics to play King's dreaded "woman in room 217." And XFX effects designer Steve Johnson talks about bringing King's hedge animals to life, an element that was sorely lacking in Kubrick's adaptation. We also take a look back at Kubrick's version, an appreciation that goes beyond its differences with King's source material. Whether King can manage to make audiences forget Kubrick's embellishments remains to be seen. We can only applaud that he has the nerve to try.

Since we're heading into TV's May sweeps, our issue also highlights other network genre events like Dean Koontz's mini-series *INTENSITY* and ABC's new four-hour adaptation of Jules Verne's *20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA*. And it's a pleasure for us to spotlight Peter Chung's *AEON FLUX*, a thought-provoking animated sci-fi series on MTV that's more than worthy of your attention.

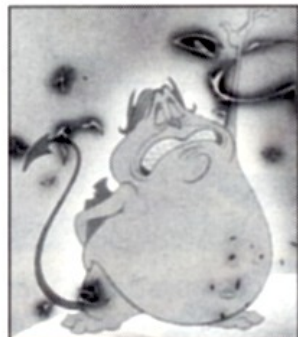
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Publisher & Editor: Frederick S. Clarke. **West Coast Editor:** Steve Biodrowski. **Bureaus:** New York/ Dan Persons, Dan Scapperotti. **Los Angeles/** Douglas Eby. **London/** Alan Jones. **Contributors:** Frank Barron, Dale Kutzera, Mike Lyons, Patricia Moir, Craig Reid, John Schofer, Frederick C. Szebin, Jay Stevenson, Debra Warlick. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Elaine Fiedler. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington, David Bellm, Robert Garcia. **Publisher's Assistant:** Lisa Coduto. **Online Marketing and Promotion:** David Bellm. **Circulation:** Reva Patterson. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke.

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EAGERLY AWAITED

STARSHIP TROOPERS (TriStar)

Based on the novel by Robert A. Heinlein, TriStar's multi-million dollar event epic charts the lives of elite members of the Mobile Infantry, a corps of dedicated young men and women soldiers fighting side-by-side in the ultimate intergalactic war—the battle to save humankind. The enemy are mysterious and incredibly powerful giant alien insects, with only one mission: survival of their species no matter what the human cost. Dutch director Paul Verhoeven (*TOTAL RECALL*) fumbled the last time out; now he reunites with the team behind his first U.S. hit, *ROBOCOP*, including producer Jon Davison and screenwriter Ed Neumeier. Verhoeven, however, sees this less as a return to *ROBOCOP* than as an echo of his earlier overseas efforts: "I think to a very important degree that *STARSHIP TROOPERS* has a lot of elements of *SOLDIER OR ORANGE*," he said. "I have a feeling that, in some way, I'm using the same approach and the same elements, but they're put in the much more extravagant framework of this space combat." Phil Tippet supervises the Creature Visual Effects. Casper Van Dien, Dina Meyer, Jake Busey, Clancy Brown, and Michael Ironside fill out the cast. **Dan Persons**

November 7



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)

ANACONDA (Columbia) April 18

Jon Voigt, Eric Stoltz, and Ice Cube star in this adventure tale set on the Amazon River, where a documentary crew is searching for a lost tribe. Voigt's shady character, however, is more interested in the tribe's mythical guardian, a huge serpent, which he believes to be a real creature. Expect "JAWS of the Jungle." Luis Llosa (*THE SPECIALIST*) directed. SEE CFQ 28:10.

AUSTIN POWER, INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY (New Line) May 2

Michael Meyers (*SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*) stars in this send-up of James Bond and spy movies. Meyers plays a secret agent from the swinging sixties who follows his archenemy Dr. Evil into modern times. The supporting cast includes Elizabeth Hurley, Michael York, Rob Lowe, and Carrie Fisher.

DOUBLE TEAM (Columbia) April 4

Hong Kong producer-director Tsui Hark, who created some of the best foreign fantasy films of the '80s and '90s (*A CHINESE GHOST STORY*, *GREEN SNAKE*, etc.), makes his American directing debut with this high-tech spy thriller, reminiscent of *THE PRISONER*. The film stars Jean-Claude Van Damme, with flamboyant basketball player Dennis Rodman making his feature debut in the co-starring role. Originally titled *THE COLONY*, the film's new title is a basketball term (used when two players guard a single opponent), apparently chosen to help attract Rodman's fans—though his audience appeal may have dropped after being temporarily suspended for his unprovoked assault on a photographer. SEE PAGE 52

THE FIFTH ELEMENT (Columbia) May 9

Bruce Willis (*TWELVE MONKEYS*) stars for director Luc Besson (*THE PROFESSIONAL*) in this "timeless story about love and survival, heroes and villains, good and evil," per the press kit. Gary Oldman and Ian Holm (*ALIEN*) co-star.

KISSED (Orion) April 11

It's not a horror film, although many viewers may be horrified by the choice of subject matter: necrophilia. Still, this is an interesting effort, worth checking out. SEE PAGE 56.

TETSUO II: BODY HAMMER (Manga) May

Encouraged by their successful platform release of *GHOST IN THE SHELL* last year (which grossed only half a million dollars theatrically but boosted video sales to an impressive 150,000 units), Manga Entertainment tries again, this time with Sinya Tsukamoto's 1992 follow-up to *TETSUO: THE IRON MAN* (1989), a 16mm b&w cyberpunk effort that received minimal midnight playdates on these shores a few years back. With better production values, 35mm, and color, *TETSUO II* is less a sequel than a further meditation on the themes of *IRON MAN*. The plot concerns another of Tsukamoto's white-collared milquetoasts, Taniguchi Tomoo (Tomoroh Taguchi), who happens to be

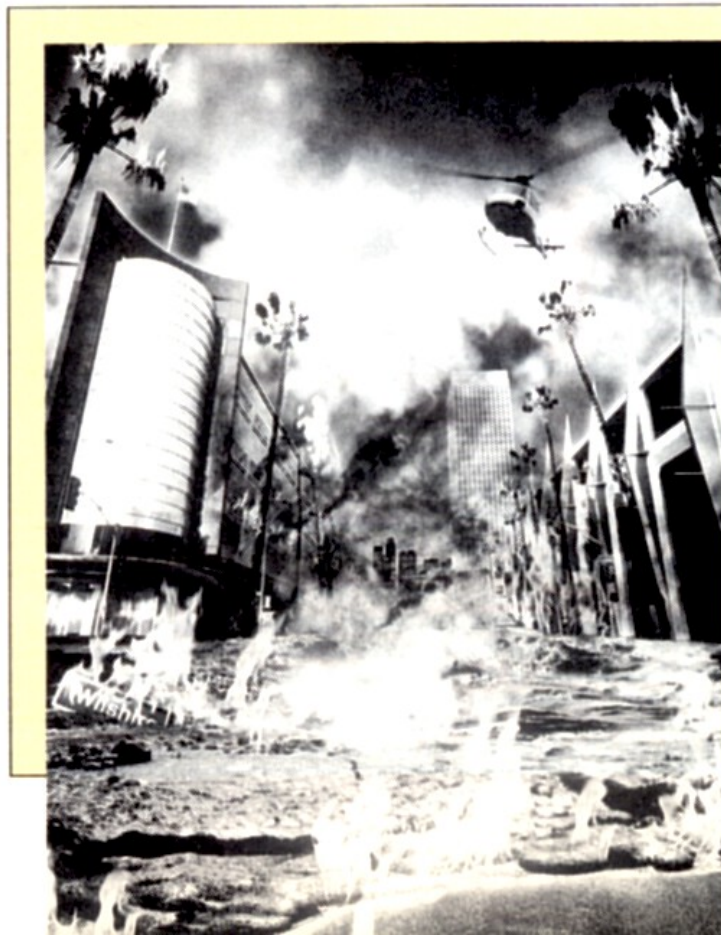
totally amnesic of his origins. After he and his family are terrorized by a gang of skin-heads, led by the enigmatic Yatsu (Tsukamoto himself), the enraged man finds himself slowly metamorphosing into a deadly cyber-weapon. Headed for a showdown with Yatsu's cadre of punks, Taniguchi is shocked to find his own identity inextricably bound with that of the similarly cursed mutant leader. This movie displays more cinematic brains and brawn than most of Hollywood's current megabuck actioners, but you'll have to keep your eye out for it: Manga will be using a limited release pattern similar to that of *GHOST IN THE SHELL*, which went out with only fifteen prints circulated to major markets. **Todd French**

THE WARRIOR OF WAVERLY STREET (Trimark) April 11

Manny Coto's film, about an alien invasion thwarted by a young boy in an alien cyber suit (*JURASSIC PARK*'s Joseph Mazzello), reaches a theatre near you. SEE CFQ 28:9.

WARRIORS OF VIRTUE (MGM) May 9

The Asian invasion continues! Ronny Yu, director of the superb Hong Kong fantasy, *THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR*, follows the footsteps of John Woo, Ringo Lam, and Tsui Hark to America. The difference is that, judging from preview footage, Yu's American debut at least somewhat resembles his overseas work. Intact is the colorful style and fanciful fight choreography that distinguishes Chinese genre efforts from their American counterparts. Less promising is the plot, which follows a teenager who finds himself in a parallel world, where he joins the titular characters (animal-like creatures with human characteristics) in a battle against an evil warlord. Clearly, the film is aimed at the *POWER RANGERS* audience, and the *Warriors* (known as *Roos*) suggest unwanted memories of those kangaroo critters in the disastrous *TANK GIRL*. Still, with Yu at the helm, this has the potential to be the breakthrough effort that *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA* failed to be. SEE PAGE 8



DELAYED ERUPTION

VOLCANO (Fox)

Originally scheduled for February 28, Fox's *VOLCANO* went dormant after Universal pushed *DANTE'S PEAK* up to February 7. At that point, beating the rival production into theatres was out of the question: opening *VOLCANO* on the previous weekend, January 31, would have conflicted with Fox's other big event release, *STAR WARS*. Instead, with the race definitely lost, Fox pushed the film back and used the time to fine tune special effects. Tommy Lee Jones, Don Cheadle, and Anne Heche star in a story about a volcanic eruption from the La Brea Tar Pits that devastates Los Angeles—an extremely unlikely scenario that puts this one more in the science fiction-fantasy category than *DANTE'S PEAK*. Mick Jackson directed.

Spring

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

EX-FILES PRODUCER?

After next season, Chris Carter plans to abandon TV for movies.

by Debra Warlick

The future of THE X-FILES as fans know and love it may be in jeopardy: series creator Chris Carter says he plans to leave the critically acclaimed and highly rated Fox show after one more season. "I think the fifth season will be the last for me," he announced at the Television Critic's Association conference in Pasadena, California, last January. "That's what I'm obligated contractually to do. Fox will probably want to continue, as the actors are contracted beyond that." Carter added that he loves the X-FILES and his new show, MILLENNIUM, but he figures at that point he will be ready to move on.

Carter spoke of his desire to put more focus on the upcoming X-FILES movie, which might be filmed this summer. "I'm writing the feature film right now, and I would like to do more movies after that," he said, explaining that the advantage of a feature film over television is that more time can be spent on special effects.

"I think we need a minister of propaganda to put dummy scripts out there," he added with a laugh, addressing the fear that the movie will give away the fifth season's plot if details get out before the end of the season. "The movie will be cu-



Series creator Chris Carter (Insert), whose show won five Golden Globe awards this year, plans to leave THE X-FILES after completing the fifth season.

mulative, [based] on the end of the fifth season of THE X-FILES. Instead of having a cliffhanger that we come back to at the start of the next season, the answers will be in the movie."

Asked who will star in the film, Carter joked: "Mulder and Scully will be played by Richard Gere and Jodie Foster." Further questions on the subject were discouraged when Carter announced, "I won't whet appetites more about the movie."

Carter took the opportunity to confirm rumors about Stephen King angling for a gig on one of the shows. It started when X-FILES star David Duchovny appeared on an episode of "Celebrity Jeopardy" with King, who expressed interest in the show. "Stephen King wants to write an episode," said Carter. "He first talked about THE X-FILES, but then he called out of the blue and said he wanted to write for MILLENNIUM. Then he said that would be too hard, and he wanted to do (X-FILES). I plan on speaking to him again soon." Carter also said that it did not work out for Quentin Tarantino to direct an episode, because he is not a member of the Directors Guild of America (Tarantino received spe-

cial permission to direct an episode of E.R., but the DGA declined to indulge him a second time).

As for future projects, Carter later said that he has some ideas for a series completely different from his current creations: "I've thought of something with animation and puppeteering; I have people I work with who are good with series, whom I would like to work with again," he said, declining to

INVASION AMERICA

by Chuck Wagner

By all outward appearances there's no way of knowing that the building on Ventura Boulevard is anything other than a medical center. Only a sign in the underground parking lot, by the elevator, betrays the presence of: "DreamWorks—4th Floor."

Inside the stealth offices of DreamWorks Animation, doors are controlled by badges which activate key locks—just like in the bowels of secure Pentagon programs. In a room without windows and devoid of pictures or illustrations, unused thumbtacks dot the walls. Anything which might have hung there has been removed. Outside that room, forces bent on conquest mobilize for INVASION AMERICA, Steven Spielberg's prime time animated series about a dark, mysterious and terrifying power, set to invade our shores.

What is this invader? That's classified, of course. But in the sanitized room where we spoke, Frank Paur (GARGOYLES) provided tantalizing hints: "We're treating it very much like a Lovecraft tale," he said. "We want it to be as scary as hell. If you read Lovecraft, most of his stuff is more rooted in science fiction than it is in supernatural horror. We want this show to

continued on page 61



Production Starts

BLADE

Wesley Snipes (DEMOLITION MAN) stars in and co-produces this adaptation of the comic book character. Stephen Norrington directs, from a script by David Goyer (THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS). Stan Lee is executive producer.

VIRUS

HALLOWEEN's Jamie Lee Curtis co-stars with Donald Sutherland (OUTBREAK) in this action-thriller for producer Gale Anne Hurd. John Bruno directs, from a script by John Hensleigh, Dennis Feldman, and Chuck Pfarrer.

Short Notes

New Zealand director Peter Jackson (DEAD/ALIVE) has apparently just completed the shortest Hollywood career in movie history. After the breakthrough success of his art house effort HEAVENLY CREATURES, he directed the big-budget fright flick THE FRIGHTENERS for Universal, who were so happy with the result that they offered him their long dormant remake of KING KONG. Unfortunately, Jackson's first studio pic tanked at the box office, and when he handed in his KONG script, Universal paid him off and showed him the door. Reportedly, Jackson will return to making the sort of independent films that first garnered him attention. Jackie Chan's SUPERCOP co-star Michelle Yeoh (whose last name is usually Americanized to Khan for English-speaking audiences) will be the next Bond girl, opposite Pierce Brosnan. The film is planned for Christmas. Paramount has optioned TIME JUMPERS as a starring vehicle for Tom Cruise and Emilio Estevez. The premise, by Bo Zenga, who will co-write and co-produce, is that an elite group of federal agents can travel back in time to record crimes and use the tapes as evidence in court, but they can go no further back than two weeks, and their time limit in the past is 29 minutes. □

MORTAL KOMBAT II

The sleeper success of the video-game-turned-movie spawns a sequel.

By Alan Jones

It has already generated over \$2 billion in revenues accrued from an interactive video game, a live stage show, a platinum music album, a direct-to-video animated special, a USA Network cartoon series, comic book tie-ins, toy lines, one of the biggest Internet Websites in the world, and a feature film. Upon the heels of this success comes *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*, the sequel to the 1995 sleeper *MORTAL KOMBAT*. Returning to the Mystical Martial Arts Fantasy world are ex-Bond girl Talisa Soto, playing Kitana, the 10,000 year-old princess from another dimension, and fight choreographer Robin Shou also reprises his role as Liu Kang. Elsewhere, James (THE PHANTOM) Remar takes over as Rayden the Thunder God (the production schedule conflicted with a prior commitment for originator Christopher Lambert), with Sandra Hess, Deron McBee, Lynn Red Williams, Tae Kwan Do Olympic gold medalist Dana Hee, and Eskimo supermodel Irina Pataeva cast as either courageous heroes or fearsome foes.

Audience research played a part in finessing the overall thrust of MK:A. Producer Larry Kasnoff explained, "We found that, while under 25 year-olds loved *MORTAL*



Expect major changes in *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*. From the first film (above) only Robin Shou and Talisa Soto (1st and 2nd from left) are returning.

KOMBAT, older audiences—although pleasantly surprised they liked it—thought the story was too simple. So, in conjunction with writers Brent V. Friedman and Bryce Zable, we have made our plotline more intricate this time to broaden our audience base."

Cinematographer John Leonetti (who photographed the original) makes his directing debut on the

film. His first chore was to adjust the script for the budget figure of \$30 million. "The original script draft would have cost upwards of \$75 million because it was a better, more involved and complicated story than the first film. I had to make efficient cuts to ensure we still had the coolest story possible at a price we could afford."

That's where Leonetti's experience working with directors Walter Hill and John Frankenheimer, producer Joel Silver, and megastar Arnold Schwarzenegger came in handy. He explained, "I've come up through the ranks of the action film. I know what works and what doesn't. The key to *ANNIHILATION* is that I've gotten deeper inside the action than ever before. I've used a handheld 18mm. lens to get as close to the actors as possible. I've strapped cameras to the actors' chests, or have them hold a camera as they fly through the air. I've put cameras behind plexiglass so the lens can literally be hit by a baseball bat which fills the frame. I've also got a rig called a 'Wackicam'—it's a wide-angled lens camera on a bungee-rope system. All the point-of-view shots in *ANNIHILATION* will have a tremendously powerful impact on audiences because they will be in the thick of the action."

STEEL

by Debra Warlick

Based on the popular comic book character, *STEEL* stars basketball great Shaquille O'Neal (*KAZAAM*) and Judd Nelson (*THE BREAKFAST CLUB*). "[Shaq] is the good guy, and I'm the bad guy," said Nelson. "It was fun—an action film where I got to run around, sweat a lot, blow things up, and shoot guns. Shaq was very professional to work with—a lot of fun." The story has Nelson working for the Army, making special sonic and electronic fire weapons. "I cause a huge accident, and get scarred. [Co-star] Annabeth Gish is crippled, and Shaq of course is fine—he's a giant. I get dismissed from the army, and Shaq quits. They start seeing on the news that these weapons are being used by gang members. Shaq says, 'I know one guy who has the technology to do this,' and he and Annabeth have to hunt me down like a dog." Playing a maniacal techno-genius was more fun the appearing as a good guy. "Bad guys get to bounce off the walls. But it's incredibly enjoyable to play someone who's pleasant. And heroes are a little stiff—they seem to always make the right decisions, unlike in my life or other people's lives." □

Obituaries

Adriana Caselotti

On January 19, the world lost one of animation's most distinctive voices. Adriana Caselotti was chosen by Walt Disney, over 150 other actresses, as the voice of Snow White in the studio's very first animated feature. Mr. Disney chose the 18 year-old actress because he enjoyed Adriana's chirpy, child-like tones. In 1994, Caselotti was named a "Disney Legend," an honor the company bestows on those who have made significant contributions to the studio and/or company. Ms. Caselotti died of cancer. She was 80-years-old. **Mike Lyons**

Amando De Ossorio

The Portuguese auteur, responsible for the entertaining series of "Blind Dead" movies in the 1970s, died last October. Although he directed other horror films (e.g., 1972's *THE LORELEY'S GRASP*), his enduring contribution to horror cinema will be the Knights Templar, first introduced in *TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD* (1972). Inspired by an actual order of post-Crusades knights who were eventually denounced and executed as witches (probably for political reasons), the film portrayed the Templars rising from the dead in modern times as eyeless corpses, unable to see but capable of tracking their victims by sound. This innovative twist on the zombie sub-genre was successful enough to launch a series: the subsequent films were *RETURN OF THE EVIL DEAD* (1973), *THE GHOST SHIP* (1974), and *NIGHT OF THE SEAGULLS* (1975). Though seldom seen in the U.S., due to poor distribution, the films are worth tracking down on video.

Laurence Austin

The owner of the Silent Movie Showcase in L.A. was shot to death on January 17 at his theatre. The only U.S. theatre devoted exclusively to pre-sound cinema, the Showcase kept silent classics before the public eye, including horror efforts from the likes of Lon Chaney and Tod Browning, among others.

William Lancaster

The 49-year-old son of Burt Lancaster died January 4 of a heart attack. The screenwriter of *THE BAD NEWS BEARS* (1975), he was known to genre fans for scripting John Carpenter's 1982 remake of *THE THING*. **Jay Stevenson**

Quicksilver Highway

Director Mick Garris combines Stephen King and Clive Barker.

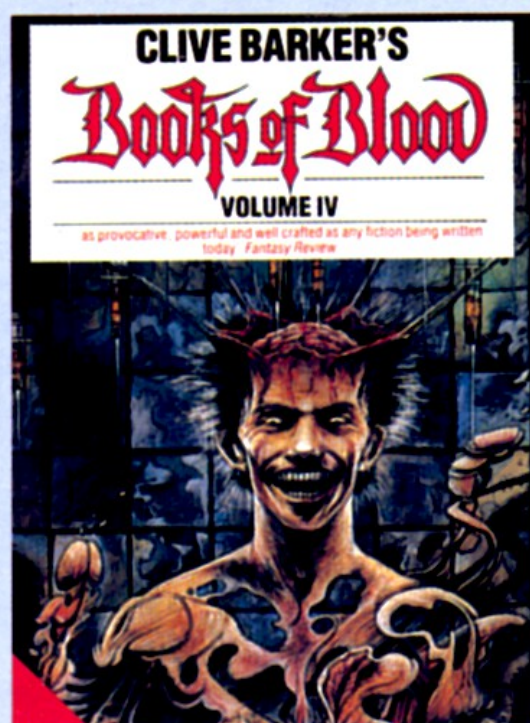
By Frederick C. Szabin

Writer-director Mick Garris continues his excursions into horror on the path blazed by *THE STAND* and the new version of *THE SHINING* with the upcoming two-hour anthology Fox Network movie *QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY*. Stephen King and Clive Barker provide stories for Garris's script—"Chatterry Teeth" from King's *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* and "The Body Politic" from Barker's *Books of Blood Vol IV*, published as *The Inhuman Condition* in the States.

Set to air in late May, the same month as *THE SHINING*, the project originally began on ABC as a one-hour series pilot for director John McTiernan. McTiernan and Garris work through the same agency, so it was only natural that McTiernan's wife and producer, Donna Dubrow, would attempt to team them to develop a horror-based pilot that Garris would have scripted and McTiernan would have directed.

"They flew me out in their private jet to their ranch in Wyoming to meet with McTiernan and talk about what he wanted," Garris recalled. "When he came to pick us up at the tiny airport there to take us to the ranch, he had no idea who I was! [Garris laughed.] It made for an interesting weekend."

McTiernan devised an anthology concept that was to utilize urban legends and true ghost stories, while Garris thought such an approach could be very limiting and wanted to opt for something that could use literary sources and original ideas.



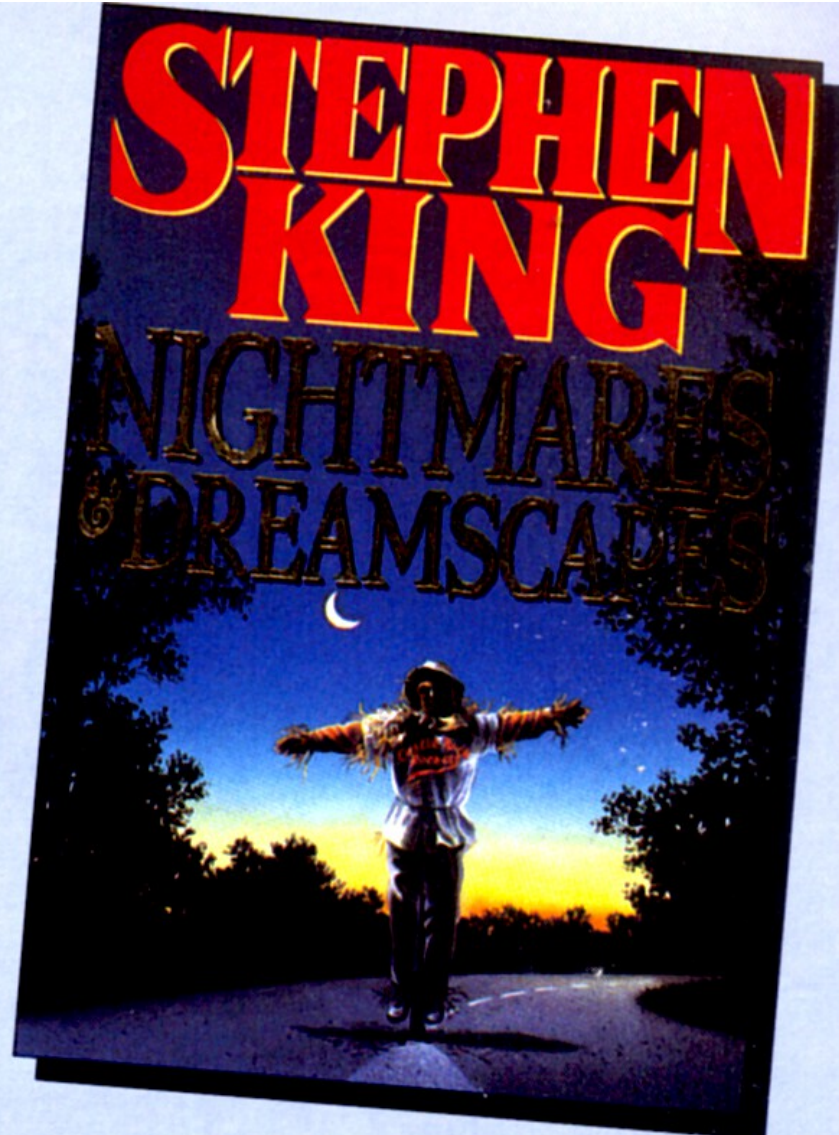
Also included in the two-hour telefilm is Clive Barker's "The Body Politic," from *Books of Blood Volume IV*.

script and received raves from the ABC executives he had been dealing with, but like any other top-heavy corporate structure, the network has higher-ups above the higher-ups, which is where the ABC project stalled. "I think they'll be kicking themselves when they see that a competing network has a two-hour movie with King's name on it," said Garris.

With the project back in his hands, Garris added Barker's "The Body Politic," about a British blue collar worker whose hands decide to overthrow the tyranny of the body and create their own movement. The adaptation of "Chatterry Teeth," Garris noted, is quite faithful to the story with about 60-70 percent of King's dialogue intact. But the abstract, internal nature of "The Body Politic" needed revisions to make it presentable on television. Garris updated the story to modern-day America with a plastic surgeon in the place of the blue collar Brit. To tie the stories together Garris created the film's framework; a rather unusual and mysterious character

When McTiernan's proposed concept fell through, Garris created his own anthology idea and wrote a script using King's "Chatterry Teeth," which follows the adventure of traveling salesman Bill Hogan who picks up a hitchhiker during an Arizona sand storm after having purchased a most remarkable pair of steel teeth at a dusty old gas stop. When the hitchhiker turns out to be Hogan's worst nightmare, guess what comes to save the day.

Garris handed in the



Mick Garris's two-hour horror anthology for Fox TV includes Stephen King's "Chatterry Teeth," from *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*.

travels the highways and biways of the country in a 1965 Rolls Royce Silver Cloud, pulling a silver Air Stream trailer behind it. In the trailer is his wandering museum of the macabre representing different regions of the country. Anyone who enters his museum to see the artifacts gets the story behind it, which comes to life with the visitor as the star.

QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY is a "backdoor pilot," a one-shot TV movie that could become a series, although Garris would prefer to make a series of two-hour movies rather than a weekly program so that "we can continue to get really wonderful material from great writers like Steve and Clive."

Although Garris's association with King has been long and fruitful, his relationship with Barker goes back even further. "We got together and wrote a pilot years ago when he first signed with Creative Artists Agency," Garris recalled. "My agent introduced us. I was a big fan of his *Books of Blood*. We wrote something called *SPIRIT CITY, USA* for ABC, and coincidentally one of our producers on *QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY*, Bruce Sallan, was the executive at the production company that hired us to do *SPIRIT CITY*. I had also written *IN THE FLESH* as a feature for Warner Brothers that Clive was going to direct, then I was going to direct. I was also the writer who initially wrote his version of *THE MUMMY* when he was going to direct that years ago [at Universal]."

Garris's original title for *QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY* was *ROUTE 666*, but the network wouldn't go for that. And Garris acknowledged that some of King's grislier action will have to be toned-down for tele-

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Warriors of Virtue

**Mutant kangaroos kick-box
for peace and harmony.**

By Dan Scapperotti

The age-old story of good versus evil is about to get a new spin when the \$36 million **WARRIORS OF VIRTUE** hits the screen May 9. The film is a production of the Law brothers, four doctors in Denver who were raised in Hong Kong. They hired Hong Kong filmmaker Ronny Yu, the dynamic director of 14 features, including **THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR**.

Ryan Jeffers is a teenager with a physical ailment who escapes the confines of reality by submerging himself in a fantasy world, the mythical land of Tao, where peace and harmony are defended by the five Warriors of Virtue. Yun represents the virtue of benevolence and the force of water; Yee, righteousness and the strength of metal; the virtue of order is represented by Lai, with the integrity of wood; wisdom is Chi's virtue and the power of fire his forte; Tsun's virtue is marked by loyalty and the security of earth. These creatures are half human, half kangaroo. Their strength and energy is derived from the earth's elements: fire, water and air. Their own martial arts style is unique, using a combination of the body, heart, soul and intellect.



J. Todd Adams as Chi, animatronic makeup by Tony Gardner's Alterian Studios.

While actors inhabit the elaborate Warriors' costumes, the intricate heads are animatronics created in Los Angeles and transported to the Beijing Studios in China. "All the emotional expressions are in the head movements," said Yu. "The expressions on the face are animatronic, remote control. We need the actor inside to interpret the motions. It's a very complex and difficult process because you need the cooperation of all different areas to make it work. They have a lot of armor and a big tail and big feet and hands."

The characters, or Rooz as they're affectionately called, were created by Tony Gardner, a 13-year veteran of special effects who worked on such films as **ALIENS**, **CO-COON** and **GORILLAS IN THE MIST** before setting up his own shop, Alterian Studios, in Los Angeles.

Hong Kong costume designer Shirely Chan and her team had the daunting task of fabricating 5,000 costumes for the large cast. Not only did they dress the Warriors, but also villagers, armies, the villain Komodo and his female entourage as well as the stunt doubles. They used a lot of Velcro.

As the scale of the film began to escalate, the budget began to eliminate some prime locations. Los Angeles, Toronto and Vancouver soon became too expensive. Even Mexico fell by the wayside. Since Yu had just completed **THE PHANTOM LOVER** at the Beijing Studios in China, that was his next stop in search of studio space.

"I was pretty familiar with the construction, people, production supply and support there," said Yu. "I needed to have something like 18 sets built because we're talking about creating a whole different world. I didn't want it to be all computer graphics. I wanted



Yun (Jack Tate) does battle with Komodo (Angus MacFayden).

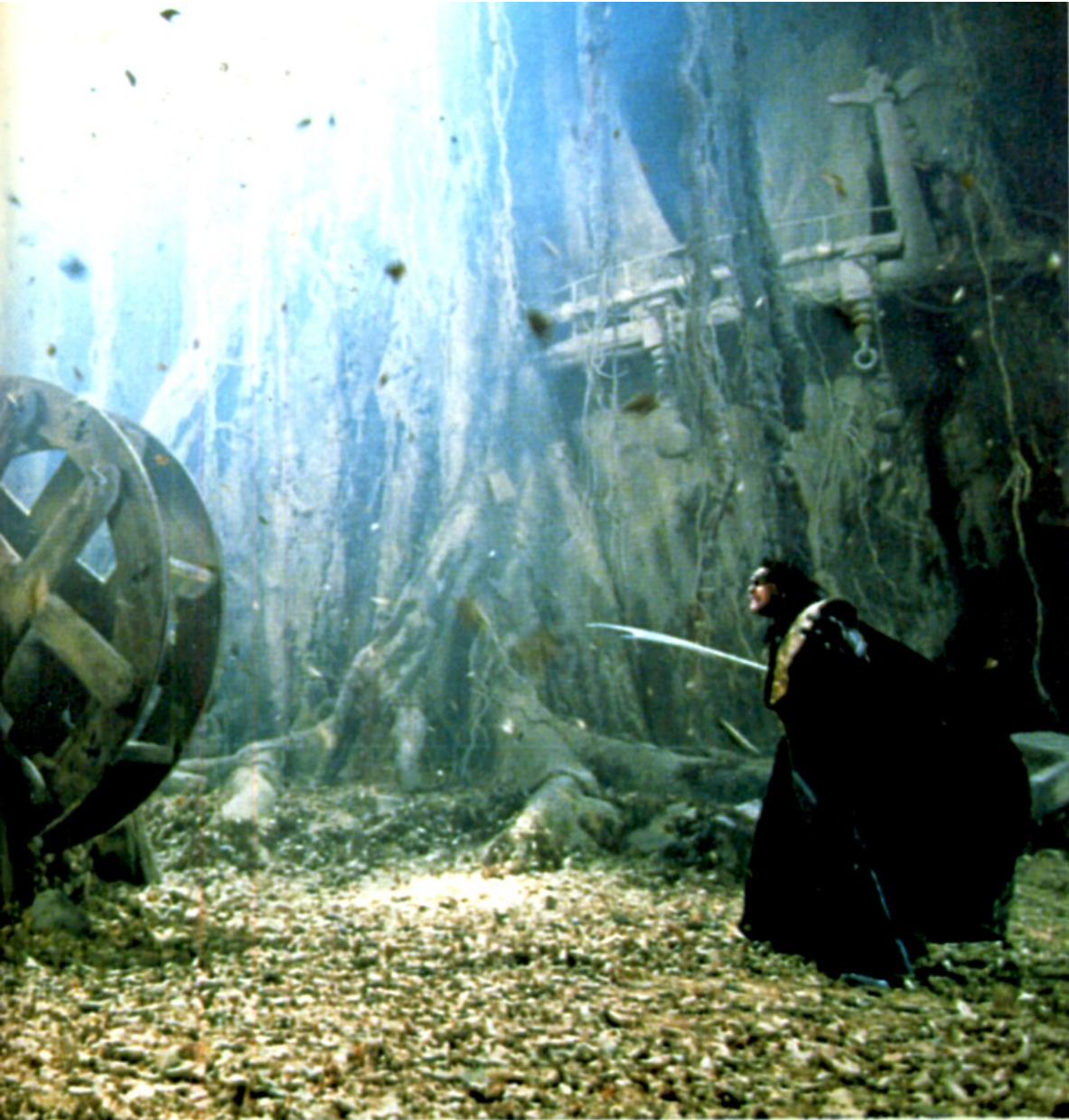
them to be physically built sets. So we needed a big studio. Finally we budgeted for Beijing, China and it worked out well."

Besides the Rooz, the fantasy world of Tao would be created by a series of massive sets. Eugenio Zanetti,

1995 Academy Award winner, was brought on board the project as set designer. Detailed models were built to be used to create the life-size replicas.

"The place where the Rooz live is called the Life Spring," said the director, "and has waterfalls, rivers and people rowing in boats and all that. Then we have the forests and trees where they fight. Then we have this huge fortress where the bad guys live. Actually for the villain's fortress, I had to hire a basketball stadium because I was running out of space. They covered it and did all the construction inside. China's the only place you can do this. Elsewhere they don't allow you to do that. This is the first American film that I'm doing so they were very supportive."

The human cast includes Mario Yedidia as Ryan Jeffers. Yedidia played opposite Robin Williams in **JACK** and appeared as James in **JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH**. Angus MacFayden is the villainous Komo-



The effects fantasy was filmed at Beijing Studios in China, with visual effects created in Canada, Hong Kong and L.A. MGM opens the action/adventure May 9.

do who is out to conquer the land of Tao. The actor is best known to American audiences as the treacherous Robert the Bruce in BRAVEHEART.

"The character, Komodo, is a lost soul in this land of Tao," Yu explained. "He is a conqueror who likes to possess things. So he keeps conquering, and destroying because he himself is an empty person inside who can't find fulfillment even though he has all this power. Then this kid shows him the way to become a better person. That's what I like about this movie. It's not like any other big action movie. It's about the warriors of virtue. They cannot kill people. You have to transform people. Show them the way."

The beautiful, but treacherous, Elysia is played by Marley Shelton, who was cast as Trish Nixon in Oliver Stone's NIXON and has had recurring roles in the HERCULES TV series. "I needed a girl who has this innocent look," said Yu. "Deep inside, she has this dark side and there is this transformation from good to bad. She had that quality when I interviewed her. Inside, behind that beauty,

there is a dark side."

There is a massive invasion sequence with thousands of extras as Komodo's soldiers invade the land of Tao. "We planned out all the action and how we were going to shoot it each day," said Yu. "It's a tedious thing, but if you plan it well and each department knows what you are looking for that particular day, then it's easy. Those scenes took a couple of weeks to film."

"We thought everyone would understand English. One assistant director from L.A. started using English to give them instructions and they would just stand there and stare at her. Then we'd find out from

The heroes harness the forces of nature (water, wood, earth, fire and metal), but their most powerful weapon is goodness. Right: Director Ronny Yu.



DIRECTOR RONNY YU

"I kept telling the producers that this story is about the journey of this kid, but for me it's also a journey of discoveries: child actors, animatronics, different nationalities."

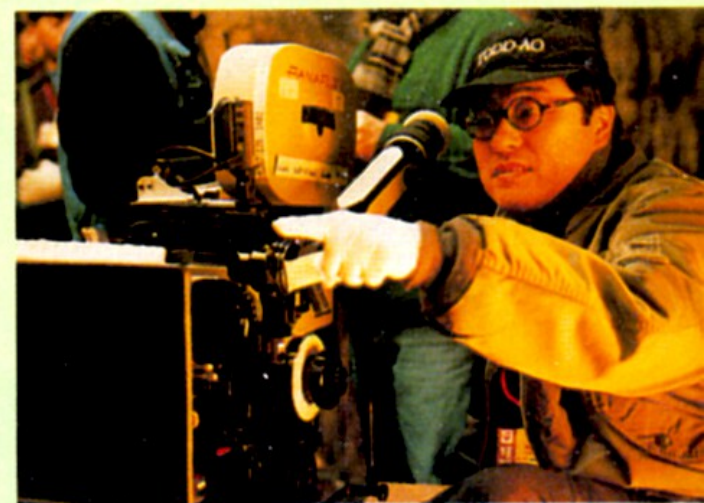
the translator that most of them didn't speak English. We had students, professors, people visiting China from different countries. Most of them were from Russia, some from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy. But they all spoke Mandarin. They're all students and professors and people who work in China and had to learn Chinese."

The special visual effects were created in Toronto, Vancouver and Hong Kong as well as Los Angeles. "The visual effects are just an enhancement to this world, especially at the end when they defeat the bad guys," said Yu. "Then I use a lot of CG because we see the five elements water, fire, earth, metal and wood join together to cleanse this bad guy without destroying him."

The research and development of the Rooz used a significant portion of the film's budget. Besides the actor in the costume, each of the Rooz is operated by a six-person team armed with remote control devices designed to move one aspect of the Warrior's head; the eyebrows, the forehead movement, the lip movement to keep it in sync with the dialogue, as well as the eyes, the chin and ear movements. "Imagine the amount of coordination in-

involved!" exclaimed Yu. "The only way for me to direct them was through an intercom microphone inside their heads and an ear piece on each one of these puppeteers. Later we found out that the ear piece inside the actor's suit didn't work that well. Why? Because of the machines. All those different motors inside the head are so loud the actors couldn't hear me. We had to redesign a set of intercoms in China just for that."

Used to small budget, Hong Kong productions, Yu found himself leading a virtual army of cast and crew members as well as being confronted with an impressive array of visual effects technology. "I kept telling the producers that this story is about the journey of this kid," said Yu, "but for me it's also a complete journey of all these discoveries. Shooting animatronics which I've never done before, handling child actors, handling all these extras from



different nationalities and handling all the crew from different nationalities. Every day we had 360 crew members. We have 100 crew members from US and 200 from China and then we have 60 from Hong Kong and my sound guy is from Australia. It was a tremendous amount of organization. At the beginning nobody thought this was going to be this big, big film." □

A

Jon Voight and

By Douglas Eby

ANACONDA director Luis Llosa has had previous experience working in the South American jungles, with his company, Iguana Productions, providing production services to Roger Corman and others, and as director of two feature films, EIGHT HUNDRED LEAGUES DOWN THE AMAZON, and FIRE ON THE AMAZON. He noted that ANACONDA is a different genre than one he is more familiar with: "This is more in the horror-thriller vein," he said. "My other films were more adventure. And I was working with a much bigger crew than I had before. Logistically it was more complicated, but the fact that I was working in the jungle with all the dangers and excitement, it was basically the same." Columbia/TriStar opens the film nationwide April 18. The production headquarters of ANACONDA was located in Manaus, Brazil, and there was a lodge in "the middle of the jungle" according to Llosa, with an additional location about twenty minutes by boat from Manaus. Iguana Productions also produces the highest rated TV show in Peru, and Llosa notes with the budget of ANACONDA "I could do about 90 films in Peru. Working with such a comparatively large budget is a matter of putting yourself in the right perspective, and reminding yourself that you don't have to practice guerrilla filmmaking in the sense of cutting corners or limiting yourself. You have to remind yourself you can use this crane, or use this other effect.

"I think it's good when you have a bigger budget, you can let your imagination fly higher. As a filmmaker, it opens possibilities for you, definitely. Especially when you're in remote places and you have no one from Hollywood on your shoulders. It gets a little more complicated, with bigger crews and bigger equipment. But you have such professional help and such state-of-the-art possibilities, that definitely becomes a plus."

Llosa had not worked with creature animatronics before. "It was a learning process," he said. "Since day one, I had very good communication with Walt Conti, the animatronic creator. Along the way we were always in sync. Walt was very good, very creative."

In addition to the mechanicals, there



Top: Animatronic horror, a forty foot puppet built by Walt Conti's effects team wraps up Ice Cube. Center: The computer graphic snake strikes at Jon Voight. Below: The 25-foot puppet behind the scenes, during filming.



ANACONDA

director Louis Llosa on their JAWS with fangs.

were some real anaconda snakes used for some shots, plus, Llosa noted, "For the main attack moments, we have computer graphic ones. The animatronics wouldn't be able to do the main lunging and coiling. The anaconda basically wraps around you, and you sort of rotate with the animal while it's squeezing. We don't have the final effect yet, but from what I've seen, they've done a good job in matching the computer graphics to Walt Conti's animatronics."

One of Llosa's concerns was being able to visually match the real jungle locations with the L.A. Arboretum set, but Llosa noted, "Kurt Petrocelli, our production designer, did a very good job in terms of disguising the difference. We jumped from the Amazon to the jungle we created here in the Arboretum, and you still have the sense you're deep in the jungle. And the idea was also that as the film progresses, as the story gets further and further along, the jungle gets more claustrophobic, which lends a better sense of fear and terror to the characters. So it worked out well, and we did most of that more claustrophobic jungle here, more in close."

Shooting ANACONDA, Llosa said, "has been a good exercise into a terrain that as a filmmaker, especially in America, you're going to encounter—which is all the special effects, animatronics, computers. And I hadn't dealt with all that before. It has been a challenge."

"I try to choose projects that in a way have a sense of adventure in making them. I guess that's why I've shot in the jungle before—in Peru, and in Australia when I did SNIPER. I'd rather choose the type of projects like ANACONDA. It's almost a way of life."

The nature of his character and the fun of it made working on ANACONDA a pleasurable departure from a number of his other roles, said Jon Voight ("man of the jungle" Paul Sarone): "It's an old-fashioned adventure story. Comparable to JAWS or something like that. But it's something I had never done before, and therefore it was a lot of fun for me to try to play this character who has so much to do with the suspense and fun of the piece. I was in a very playful state throughout; I had a lot of chuckles with it."

Agreeing that Sarone is very different from the more reality-based men he's played



Jon Voight as Paul Sarone, having fun with a JAWS-like monster flick. Right: Director Louis Llosa, mastering the Hollywood effects picture.



in such projects as HEAT and MISSION IMPOSSIBLE, Voight noted "He's a bizarre character, and my sense of the macabre was tickled. You know, I don't want to take this guy too seriously, but it was fun for me because I chuckled at what the audience was going to get out this film. And I think I pulled it off. I started off with lots of thoughts about what it should be, and knowing the story line and the demands of it, and what was needed to sell that character. I think it is going to be a lot of fun for audiences, and that's where my chuckling came in. I haven't seen much of it yet, so I really don't know, but I have a feeling Lucho [director Luis Llosa] is going to finish up very beautifully with it, with a fun score."

Voight said the role contacted some new parts of himself as an actor: "There was a little of my RUNAWAY TRAIN character in it, and having done that character helped me do this one with more ease. But this guy had a life of his own. He's one of my fa-

vorite fellows. But there's a grotesqueness to him—who knows what the ladies are going to think about him?"

Working on ANACONDA with animatronics for the first time, Voight treated the effects work as an extension to the character he was playing. "I created a persona for this snake," he said, "because in some way the snake came out of me; the need for that snake, and what it represented. Sarone wouldn't exist without that impossible, huge snake. He depended on the reality of that snake. It was some part of himself that he was trying to introduce people to."

Voight said he has an appreciation for science-fiction and fantasy films. "It has a way of expressing something, doesn't it?" he mused. "It expresses something inside us. That's what I like about it. It turns us inside out a little bit. And also, I like pieces that are poetic, and full of imagination. Sometimes as artists, as an American

actor, we're prone to—because we do think organically, and I do like that aspect—we sometimes leave the imagination away from our work. The tendency is to bolt everything down. And I think it's very healthy for us to enter into those creative realms, and just to use the imagination a little bit and not be so fixed on our

own personal experiences. Sometimes it stretches us to understand others and ourselves better—as in the case of ANACONDA; who would possibly have cast me for a mad South American poacher?"

Voight notes that "in attempting to embody the role, I found a lot about myself. I found aspects of my expression where I was saying 'Gee, that's interesting about me.' I felt completely comfortable in this mad area. And it is myself in there. I thought 'Why is it so clear for me? Why are the choices so clear in this role?' I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it, exactly how to play this, and was having fun on top of it, in these grotesque moments that were required; how much of a button to push, how harsh to be, how to pull back, how to make something that could be vulgar or funny. All these things you find out about yourself. Then you question how you got this way, what happened here? Not as a psychologist, but as an artist you find yourself interesting." □

Robin Cook's INVASION

When Cook's aliens invade, Earthlings lose individuality.

By *Frank Barron*

Robin Cook has more than 40 million books in print, most of them best-sellers. Now his latest, *INVASION*, marks the first excursion by the author into the world of science fiction, set to be aired as a miniseries on the NBC-TV network April 27-28.

Some of Cook's previous novels, *MORTAL FEAR*, *VIRUS*, and *TERMINAL* also were successful for that network. At the same time as the *INVASION* telecast, his novel of that name will be in bookstores.

Cook, a medical doctor who has given up his practice, acknowledged that other doctor friends have decided they would rather write novels. One of his friends is Michael Crichton, who also abandoned the medical field to engage in writing books.

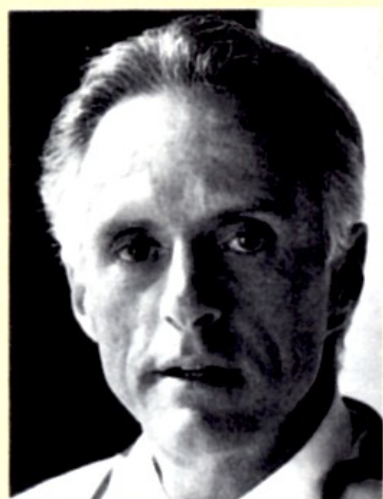
The doctor-cum-author admitted that he got into writing science fiction at the behest of TV producer Frank Von Zerneck, who produced *INVASION*.

"Science fiction," Von Zerneck pointed out, "is a natural extension of what Robin does. There's always an interesting core idea in all his books. In this instance, he took a broader notion."

Cook added that "I did step one foot into science fiction in a certain sense. My first big hit, *COMA*, was a little bit science fiction, because I stepped beyond the bounds of recognized technology, which is, in a sense, science fiction.

"I've borderlined on it, to a certain extent, in a number of my books. This was the first time I went overboard and it's a real science fiction, a real fun kind of story. I've seen a couple of science fiction things, and thought maybe I could do one, and make it different from all the others."

Cook said that when he was young, he saw



Robin Cook

"a handful of science fiction things—*THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*, *DESTINATION MOON*, and then Michael Crichton. One of his early works—*THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN*—I thought that was fun. I didn't see too many of the *STAR TREK* movies, but in preparation, my research was to sit down one night and watch all the *STAR TREK* movies.

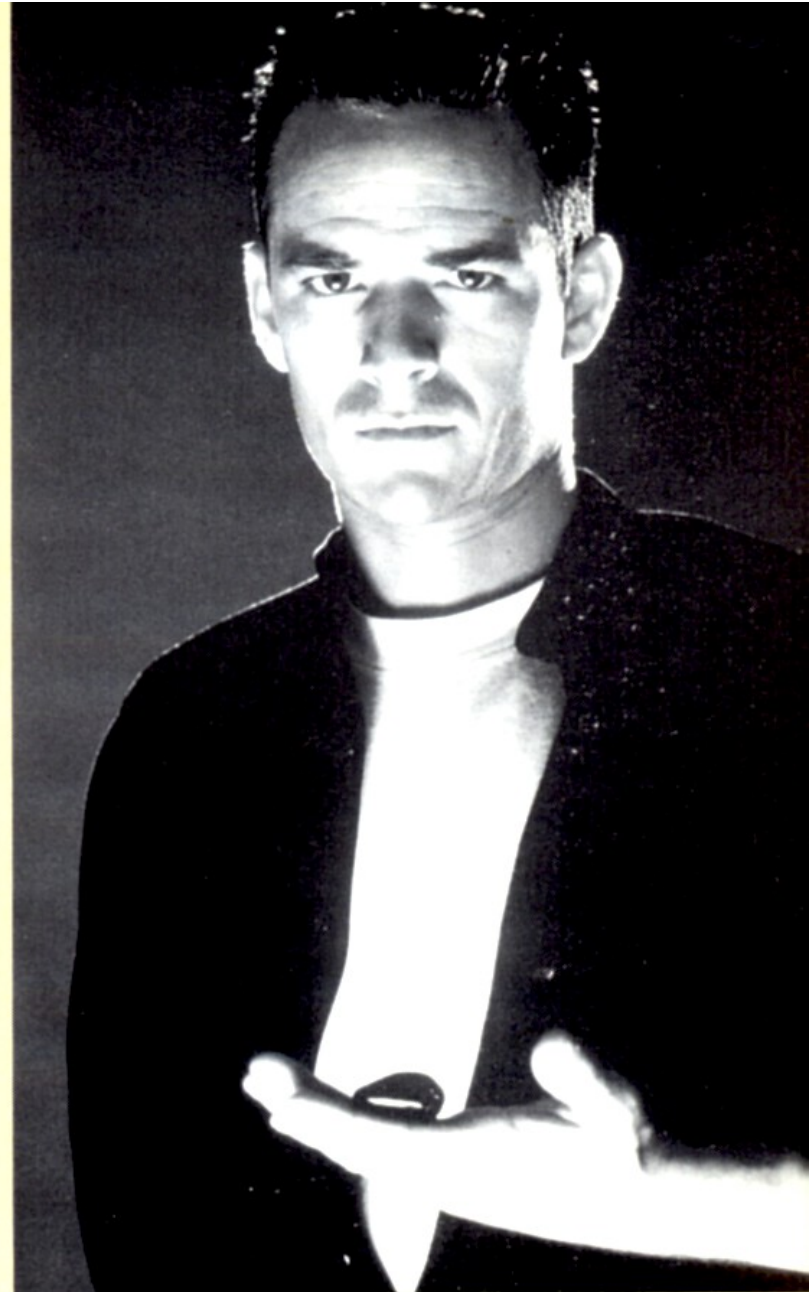
"I realized I had been missing something by not watching as much of this—maybe I should have been watching more science fiction. It could have helped me in other things."

Cook said he was seeking common themes in the sci-fi shows, so he could do "something different," but realized that "there are very much common themes, such as sequences where you see this huge, tremendous rocket ship, and then you can see it's going to Earth. I thought I'd start out like that, but then there would be almost immediately, something very different than what has happened in any of those others."

His *INVASION* deals with a deadly virus theme, aliens trying to impregnate Earth, and eventually take over. Cook admitted that "it was a way of seeing what has been done before, and in a lot of ways, there's a lot of repetition. Usually, for instance, the aliens are always bad—or somehow bad."

In his *OUTBREAK*, written in 1986, Cook tried to be prophetic. Since his books are about medicine, most of the issues he writes about are situations that really haven't happened. "Some people might call that science fiction," he mused. "Other people would just say, 'Well, I just knew what was going to happen.'"

Cook said he was aware there was a resurgence of infection—"Infected particles, whether it be viruses, or bacteria, and I thought that this was good subject matter. I



Luke Perry of *90210* gets creepy in Cook's *INVASION*, possessed by alien invaders. Cook studied sci-fi films as part of his research.

like to find things that are exciting—a little disturbing, and yet can be turned into stories."

The author pointed out that "some of the old killers [disease] are coming back, and this has been a process that's been going on now for 10 or 12 years, and the public is becoming aware of it. It's been an issue that I had been interested in back in 1986."

Von Zerneck said he has several more Robin Cook projects in development for NBC, and hoped to make one or two a year. These properties are based on Cook's previous works, and the producer noted that "several of his novels are being written now by screenwriters." He added that he was doing these books "because I love science fiction."

Cook explained that in *INVASION*, "the most frightening thing is loss of individuality. One of the things that is a basis of our western culture is the importance of the individual. What if there was some force that was coming in and taking over, so instead of you being you, you are just part of a larger whole. To me that's very scary."

Cook's next project is *CHROMOSOMES 6*, "a medical-techno thriller about genetics and molecular biology," he described. "I'll be doing it within the year, working out of my Naples, Florida office."

While calling it "science-fiction" because it could come true by the time he's finished working on it, Cook noted that, "Today many of the shows we call sci-fi are indeed medical realities."

He foresaw that his upcoming literary works might not be called science-fiction one day, "since it's all coming to pass." □

Dean Koontz's INTENSITY

Exploring the dark world of a psychopath, Koontz asks, 'Can this man be rehabbed?'

By Debra Warlick

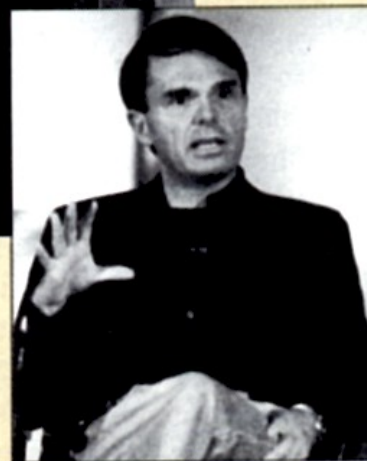
Six of Dean Koontz's novels have been adapted for film and television in the past, and not one made the suspense writer happy. And not one made much money either. But, at last, the master of thrillers is smiling. Koontz is praising the television adaptation of his novel, *INTENSITY*, scheduled to air as a four-hour miniseries on Fox-TV in May.

Koontz is co-executive producer of *INTENSITY*, which is produced by Mandalay Entertainment in association with Tri-Star Television. Among his other novels are *Lightning*, *Midnight*, *Cold Fire*, *Hideaway* and *Dragon Tears*. Koontz's books are published in 38 languages. Six novels rose to number one on the *New York Times*' best seller list and 11 of his books topped the paperback list. His latest, *Sole Survivor*, was published in February. Koontz recently signed a three-book deal with Bantam Books, with the first novel to be published in January 1998. Koontz has written the screenplay for the film adaptation of *MIDNIGHT* and he wrote and executive produced an upcoming television movie, *THE FACE OF FEAR*. The feature, *PHANTOMS*, based on his screenplay, is filming at Miramax with Peter O'Toole and Joanna Going.

John C. McGinley, Molly Parker and Piper Laurie star in *INTENSITY*. Parker plays Chyna Shepherd, who is coaxed into spending Thanksgiving with her friend Laura's family, but she can't stop thinking about her own horrific childhood. Relaxing for the first time within the normality of a loving family's holiday, her happiness is shattered by a scream. Someone has broken into the house to slaughter Laura's family one by one. Hidden under a bed, Chyna goes undetected, but when the intruder takes Laura's body as a trophy, Chyna risks



John C. McGinley as a brilliant psychopath and Molly Parker as the victim who turns the tables on him. Author Dean Koontz, (r), writing as therapy for childhood abuse.



her own life and follows him. Soon she will come face-to-face with brilliant psychopath Edger Vess (McGinley). Along the way she seeks help from a stranger as she continues her journey into the killer's dark world.

"It's true to the book—it gets to the heart of what I do, the emotional impact of it," said Koontz, an incongruous smile gracing his face from time to time. Dressed in an appropriate black jacket, blue jeans and black shoes, he also has a new addition to his look. When compared to his book jacket photos, he happily admitted to new hair on top, taking the place of his formerly balding pate. The dark, thick eyebrows remain as his most recognizable feature.

"Other books have not been successfully developed," he said. "I've been under

the label of horror writer, which I reject. In this case, the novel was developed as psychological suspense and it's about her [Chyna's] redemption and courage." Koontz made an emphatic effort to distance himself professionally from the work of horror writer Stephen King. "We're like apples and oranges," he said firmly.

And as if to prove he is undeserving of the "horror writer" title, the author also talked up another project. "I'm doing *TICK TOCK*. It's a screwball comedy with suspense."

When asked if he gets his story ideas from today's headlines, Koontz admitted sometimes there is a connection. "*INTENSITY* is based somewhat on Ed Kemper, who killed his grandparents as a juvenile, was released, and then killed nine people, including his mother," he said. "It shows we have this human urge to believe in rehabilitation." An urge which Koontz himself is more unsure of, thanks to his own family background.

"I grew up with a father who was a sociopath and I became interested in it because of him," he said. Of all his characters, Koontz noted Chyna is most like him—with her family background and her search for hope.

Writing has helped Koontz deal with his own, very real demons. "Writing is therapy. I wanted to give that back and now I get mail from kids and adults with the same background."

For Koontz, the writing process involves no outlines or rigid focus on plots. "I work from characters. I never know where a story is going. Some days, I'll sit there ten hours and turn in a paragraph."

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Walt Disney's HERCULES

Co-directors Clements and Musker turn classical mythology into animated fun.

By Mike Lyons

Remember the chariot race scene in *BEN-HUR*? Now, picture that scene with Ben-Hur getting whacked in the kisser by a banana cream pie. That, essentially, is what the Walt Disney studio is going for with their 35th animated feature, *HERCULES*, which opens nationwide June 20. "We call it an epic comedy," said *HERCULES*' producer Alice Dewey. "So, that pretty much sums it up."

"It is definitely an epic," said Ron Clements, the film's co-director. "It has this 'bigness' to it. But, throughout the movie, we're pulling together the 'bigness' with 'light-heartedness' and it's an interesting combination. There's a comedic element, even in some of its most serious moments."

In the fall of 1993, Clements and *HERCULES* other director, John Musker, (the two had helmed *THE GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE* and *ALADDIN*), were working on a film entitled *TREASURE PLANET* (a sci-fi adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*), when the idea for *HERCULES* was pitched during one of the studio's creative meetings. *TREASURE PLANET* was shelved, as the directors were immediately attracted to the mythological tale, an area of story-telling that's ripe for animation and yet has never been explored.

"It just gives you so much to work with," said Dewey. "There are such great creatures like centaurs and satyrs and griffins; characters that can shape change. It's really so suitable to animation. I really don't know why we've never done it before."

"You can design it, so that it can exploit the things that animation can do, better than live-action in some ways," said co-director Musker of the *HERCULES* tale. "So it



Co-directors Ron Clements (left) and John Musker. The two were quite happy to take on the project. "It seemed like a natural for animation," said Musker.

seemed like a natural for animation. As far as Greek mythology is concerned, it's so rich and so visual and the only Disney animation that had been done using this was the short 'Pastoral Sequence' in *FANTASIA*."

Disney's *HERCULES* begins on Mount Olympus, with the gods, Zeus and Hera, throwing a party to celebrate the birth of their son, Hercules. As a gift, they present their new born with Pegasus, a winged horse created from the clouds. Everyone at the party is impressed with the young tyke's strength, except for one guest named Hades. This Lord of the Underworld has grown tired of his title and is secretly planning a "hostile takeover" of Mount Olympus.

Hades learns that, in 18 years, he will be able to take over Zeus territory, but his one obstacle will be Hercules. The fiery villain quickly devises a plan and dispatches his sidekicks, Pain and Panic, to Mount Olympus to kidnap Hercules, administer a potent "Grecian formula," which would render him mortal and then dispose of the baby on Earth. The two dimwits fail to give Hercules all the potion, which leaves the babe

human, with god-like strength.

Suggesting shades of *SUPERMAN*, Hercules is raised by a mortal couple. As he grows up, he uncovers his true origins and soon learns that the only way he can return to his father Zeus and Mount Olympus is to prove himself a true hero on Earth.

Atop Pegasus' back, Hercules flies to the island of Idras, where he seeks help from Philoctetes ("You can call me Phil," he says) a hero trainer. The two set off for Thebes (a huge, Manhattan-like city, which has been dubbed the "Big Olive"). On his way, Hercules meets Meg, a tough, resourceful woman unlike any he has ever met before (she also happens to work for Hades).

Once in Thebes, Hercules battles the multi-headed Hydra monster, which is brought to life in the film through the use of computer-generated imagery (CGI), a process which has become a large part of many recent Disney hits. "This is the first time that we've really animated a character in the computer," noted Dewey. "The Hydra can register marvelous expressions—anything from mirth to anger to fear to surprise—she really has quite a range."

Dewey also said that CGI allowed for spectacular cinematic possibilities. "A good part of the battle, Hercules is on Pegasus, flying through the necks [of the Hydra], so you really get some dynamic changes in perspective and space by using the computer."

After defeating the Hydra, Hercules becomes an overnight sensation in Thebes, going from "Zero to Hero," which also happens to be the title of one of the film's songs by David Zippel (Broadway's "City of Angels") and Disney favorite Alan Menken. Unlike more recent Disney features, the music in *HERCULES* is used more as narrative. Many of the film's numbers are per-



Herc, Pegasus, Philoctetes and Meg face the dark forces of Hades. The look of HERCULES is somewhat of a departure from recent Disney work, thanks in part to artist Gerald Scarfe (PINK FLOYD'S THE WALL).

formed by the Muses, who come off like a hip, Motown girls' group. "We took the Muses and made them the Greek chorus," said Dewey. "So if you know your Greek drama, the chorus provides a commentary on the action. The Muses, who are the goddesses of the arts and proclaimers of heroes, were just a natural to merge into the dramatic function." Alice also added, "It's also been really great for Alan Menken to work with a different genre. He's really enjoyed getting to have some fun with the Gospel stuff. It reminds him a little of his LITTLE SHOP [OF HORRORS] days."

Even though a hero, Hercules' obstacles are not behind him. Hades' wrath is only more fired up by the strong man's strong following and he throws a barrage of challenges at Hercules, including a Minotaur, a sea serpent, a Cyclops and the Titans, which Hades sends rampaging to Mount Olympus in the film's finale.

In the end, Hercules will try to find an answer to the question that serves as the film's central theme: What is a hero? "Even today, that's one thing that's of huge issue," said Dewey. "In the movie we spend a lot of time trying to define that. Is it fame? Is it fortune? Is it wealth? Is it notoriety? Is it good deeds? What is it to be a hero? It's the lesson that he learns in the end."

"He's sort of the first action hero. He was, as we found out in our research, extremely popular, sort of the Michael Jordan of his day," said Dewey, adding, "He's kind of a common man's hero. He's half-god, half-man. So he's more accessible than some of the Olympian gods."

Because of the 50/50 man/god element in "Herc" (as he's called in the movie), the filmmakers found a unique way to describe him. "He has sort of a dog-like personality," said Clements. "His emotions are really up front and

he's very sincere and idealistic and he tends to think before he acts sometimes. He has this vulnerability, along with his incredible strength."

Providing the voice for this new breed of hero is actor Tate Donovan (LOVE POTION NUMBER NINE). As usual, Disney has assembled an A-list of top actors to help bring the characters to life, including Rip Torn as Zeus, Samantha Eggar as Hera, Bobcat Goldthwait as Pain, Matt Frewer as Panic, with Charlton Heston reading the film's opening narration and Danny DeVito as Phil, who was such a large inspiration that it almost looks as if the actor's head has been transplanted on to the character.

"My gosh, you can see Danny DeVito's facial expressions," said Dewey. "If you look at the really early art work, before we even cast him, he was this half man/half goat, squatty thing. The design wasn't so much affected by Danny, but boy, the way [Phil] moves and talks and his facial expressions were hugely affected by Danny."

The same was true for HERCULES' hellish villain, Hades, who is given the quick-tempo performance of his voice, James Woods. "We had initially pictured him as a very smooth-talking, but laconic, laid-back character," remembered Dewey. "We were

Andreas Deja draws Herc with the aid of a design macquette. The versatile Deja also helped breathe life into ALADDIN, THE LION KING and RUNAWAY BRAIN.



“[Hercules] has sort of a dog-like personality. His emotions are really up front...He has this vulnerability, along with this incredible strength.”

—Co-director Ron Clements—

kind of going for the cool, sardonic side of him. But, when James [Woods] came in, he took the same script and somehow read it as this fast talking-used car salesman.”

Some of Disney's most talented animators worked on the project: the versatile Andreas Deja, who did the villainous Scar in THE LION KING and a very different Mickey Mouse in RUNAWAY BRAIN, serves as supervising animator for the title character; Eric Goldberg, who brought ALADDIN's Genie to life and co-directed POCAHONTAS, is behind Phil and animator Nick Ranieri (POCAHONTAS' Meeko) tries his hand at villainy with Hades.

Directors Musker and Clements and art director Andy Gaskill (THE LION KING), were greatly influenced by artist Gerald Scarfe (most famous for the animation he designed for PINK FLOYD'S THE WALL). Musker is a huge fan of the artist's off-kilter shapes, bold design and sweeping, linear graphics and Scarfe was invited to Disney during pre-production, to serve as character designer and artistic advisor. "Once we saw what he did, we were really stimulated by that," said Musker, "and we kept encouraging him to do more. We tried to have his pen point touch all the characters in the film."

Now this very different mythological tale is poised to take its place in the midst of the current animation renaissance and continue a run of Disney hits that began with another Musker/Clements film, THE LITTLE MERMAID (1989), which is due for theatrical re-release later this year. Dewey, whose roots are in theater, came

to the studio just after MERMAID had gained attention and said that being smack dab in the middle of everything has been quite a unique experience. "I really landed here right as things were taking off, so that's been great. Not only have I been able to participate in that growth, from a creative standpoint, but also in terms of the company, there have been some of us who have been here all that time and really feel part of it, with a commitment to continuing this kind of thrilling work." □

Stephen King's THE SHINING

Never mind Kubrick's version—Garris and King do the ABC miniseries by the book.

By Frederick Szebin

Stephen King, one of the 20th century's most prolific and successful authors, has reached a position that virtually no other novelist has been in throughout the history of literary and cinematic collaboration:

He is able to redo adaptations of his novels he feels weren't done well to begin with.

Adaptations of King's works range from the genuinely excellent (CARRIE, CUJO, STAND BY ME) to the patently forgettable (FIRESTARTER, CHILDREN OF THE CORN, GRAVEYARD SHIFT). The author has had to suffer a plethora of film adaptations that, in some cases, unfairly marred his reputation. None was more highly touted than the 1980 film version of his 1977 novel, THE SHINING, directed by cinema god Stanley Kubrick and starring Jack Nicholson in a performance that cemented the Nicholson mystique firmly in the heart of pop culture.

Critics baked it, while moviegoers who had not read the novel enjoyed the director's stylistic take on King's multi-layered ghost story. But for King fans, Kubrick's THE SHINING was missing crucial details, like King's rampaging hedge animals, and suffered in other numerous ways when compared to the book on which it was based.

One of the most disappoint-



In addition to scripting ABC's six-hour mini-series, the horror novelist takes his usual cameo. This time watch for King as ghostly hotel bandleader Gage Creed.

ed viewers was Stephen King. Flip forward 15 years and enter ABC and its highly successful King-based Novels for Television. After the epic undertaking of THE STAND, it seemed as though even King was beginning to run out of material. After the eight-hour miniseries proved so successful, network executives asked the author what he would like to do next. At this point, said director Mick Garris, "He started toying with the idea of doing another version of THE SHINING. He said, 'They never did the book. I always wished I could have made a film of that.' ABC got very excited about the project."

THE SHINING focuses on Jack and Wendy Torrance, and

their five-year-old son, Danny, who can "shine"—psychically tap into the spirit world and foretell events. Falling on hard times, Jack takes the family to the Overlook Hotel for a winter job as caretaker. Hoping it will ease Jack's tension and save their marriage, Wendy agrees to the move, even though the heavy snows of the area will leave them stranded and alone throughout the winter.

As time passes, the Overlook begins to exert a supernatural influence over Jack and Danny, wanting to add the boy to its netherworld gene pool by manipulating Jack, playing on his alcoholism and weak emotional constitution. The only one who knows what danger the Torrances are in is the hotel cook,

Dick Hallorann, who also has "the shine" and races to save the family as the Overlook drives Jack insane.

After directing King's epic vision of mankind's fall and rise, Mick Garris went on to two feature projects that eventually stalled—ROSE RED, a \$40 million King screenplay that was to be produced by Steven Spielberg, and the long-in-development remake of THE MUMMY. Then King offered his own script for THE SHINING.

"Stephen said, 'I've got this script. We've talked about this. Do you want to look at it?'" Garris recalled. "It was a great script, and it's hard to say no to him. I wouldn't want to. It's really quite a brilliant script, and it is the book."

As unfair as it may be, comparisons between the miniseries and the 1980 feature are inevitable. One of the first questions that comes to mind is, "Who would have the guts to remake Kubrick?" But Garris doesn't see it that way.

"If I didn't," he said, "I may as well shoot myself! I had the temerity to direct PSYCHO IV! [Garris laughed]. Kubrick is a genius. He is a brilliant filmmaker. He gave us DR. STRANGE-LOVE and LOLITA, two of the greatest films ever made. He made STANLEY KUBRICK'S THE SHINING. I saw this as making STEPHEN KING'S THE SHINING. I saw the film in 1980 and thought, 'Man, this



DIRECTOR MICK GARRIS

“If I didn’t [have the guts to remake Kubrick] I may as well shoot myself! I had the temerity to direct PSYCHO IV!...I saw [THE SHINING] in 1980 and thought ‘Man this isn’t the book.’”

stuff in the film. The filmmaking is great, but of course I’m not Stanley Kubrick. I’m far from him in achievement or ability, I’m sure. I didn’t want to walk in his shoes. What I wanted to do was visualize to the best of my ability what Steve had written.”

For this go-around, *THE SHINING* offers *WINGS*’ star Steven Weber as Jack, Rebecca DeMornay (*RUNAWAY TRAIN*) as Wendy and Cortland Mead from Warner Bros.’s *KIRK* as Danny. Melvin Van Peebles co-stars as Dick Hallorann, with Elliott Gould appearing as hotel manager Stuart Ullman.

Behind the scenes, XFX, headed by Steve Johnson, follows up his team’s Emmy Award-winning work on *THE STAND* to bring King’s sentient topiary and hallucinatory ghosts to the small screen with help from makeup supervisor Bill Corso, topiary designer Bob Newton, prosthetic supervisor Joel Harlow and co-workers Rob Henderstein (teeth and eyes), Mark Boley (hair, wigs) Mark Killingsworth (prosthetic cosmetics) and Jill Colwell and Leon Lederach (key technicians).

One choice Garris made to aesthetically distance his pro-

duction from Kubrick’s film was to use less Steadicam work than he usually would. *THE SHINING* was not the first film to use Steadicam by any means, but Kubrick’s unabashed use of it in that film was unprecedented at the time and helped show the industry what a tool the camera could be.

Another choice made was to film on location in Colorado. Garris and King had bypassed the state when filming *THE STAND*, due to Colorado’s then-active anti-gay laws. But those laws have since been overturned, which allowed the production to move in with a clear conscience. “They were very, very nice to us on *THE SHINING*,” Garris laughed, not even wanting to think what he would have done without Colorado as a setting.

The production set up at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, the very hotel that inspired King to write *The Shining*. “One of the most interesting things I learned when I was talking to Stephen King,” said XFX’s Steve Johnson, “is he spent one night in this hotel by himself and heard the stories of the caretaker who had gone crazy and killed himself there. It’s a true story. At the time, Stephen was wrestling

The undead Andrews Sisters appear as part of Jack’s hallucination in the Overlook Ballroom. Ghoul makeups supervised by Bill Corso for XFX, Inc.



The Torrances, Steven Weber as Jack, Rebecca DeMornay as Wendy and Cortland Mead as five year-old Danny, who can foretell events with his ESP.

isn’t the book!’ I really missed so much of it; the heart of Jack Torrance, his alcoholism, the family abuses and the things that were really keys to the book were pretty much missing from Kubrick’s movie. The fact that we’ve chosen to go back to the book in another film says nothing about Kubrick and what he did, other than we wanted to make the book.

“I actually did put a lot of thought in trying to distance the

miniseries from the movie as much as possible,” Garris continued. “There were specific visual and cinematic choices I made to go as far away as we could from how Kubrick chose to visualize the book. People don’t remember this because it’s become such an icon, but when the film was released in 1980 the reviews were terrible. It was a huge hit and everyone loved it, but the reviews were not good. There’s wonderful

Stephen King on THE SHINING

King relishes the chance to write and produce for television.

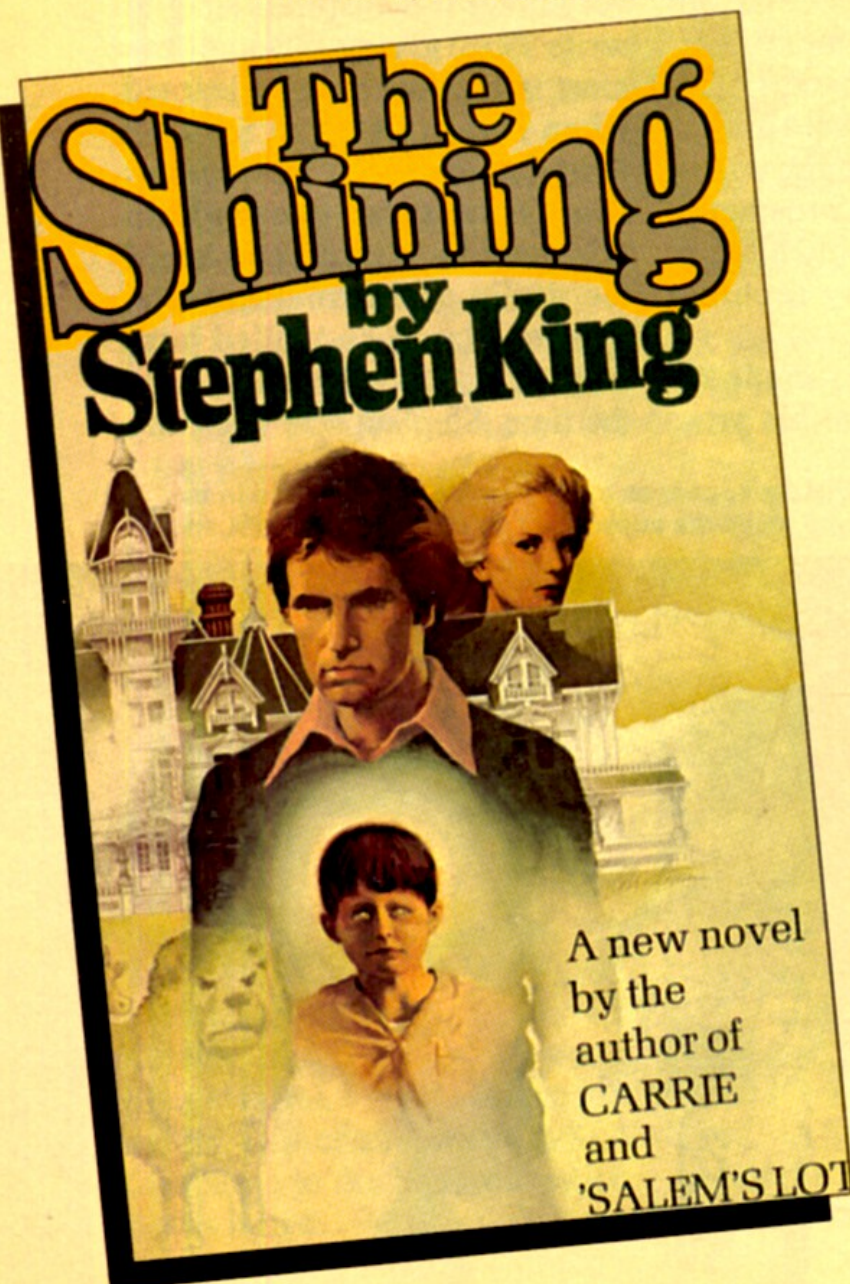
By Frank Barron

Stephen King has been called America's scaremeister—or shockmeister. There's little doubt that he's this country's top horror novelist, with most of his works translated into TV series or movies.

"I like to scare people," King laughed, "and I make them laugh. I like to entertain people. I've written some scary things, and I've written some other things, too—"The Body" and "Shawshank Redemption," but you get a reputation and—you've got it for the rest of your life."

The Shining, King's third novel, first published in 1977, was originally filmed as

King's 1977 best seller, only his third horror book, and one of his best.



a Stanley Kubrick movie in 1980, starring Jack Nicholson, but the TV version is different—"with important elements that should have been treated in a cinematic manner," explained TV director Mick Garris.

King admitted, "I am not interested in being a scream machine," although every novel is intended to frighten the reader, or at least give him something to ponder, such as with *THE LANGOLIERS*, King's story turned into a high-rated ABC miniseries in May 1995.

King explained his story as "about a haunted hotel, but also a story about a haunted marriage. The two things should work together. The reality of that abusive relationship should enhance, and make the ghost story even more frightening than it is."

He added that he "tried to write a scary book. I do like to kind of get people to come around the corner with me, and squeeze them a little bit. And I do hope this scares people."

While ghosts and things that go bump in the night abound in *THE SHINING*, King said he had no plans for a sequel, even though there is a signpost at the end which says "True Greatness Should Not Be Allowed To Die."

"It's meant ironically," he explained. "But it's also my way of trying to say that this evil that the Overlook Hotel represents can never be routed out, or burned out. It always comes back. That is my understanding of evil—that we never are able to get quite all the roots, that sooner or later it always comes back."

King admitted that he would love to do a TV series one day, "one that has an arc. I'd love to be able to tell a story that would have a beginning and an ending. But I can't see doing a series in the sense that *THE X-FILES* is a series. I'd love to write an *X-FILES* some time. That would be a kick."

The author thought one of the reasons for a resurgence of horror stories and shows could be attributed to a new generation,



King conducts *THE SHINING*, serving as executive producer and adapting his own novel as a six-hour teleplay, plus putting in a cameo as ghost Gage Creed.

raised on *THE TWILIGHT ZONE* and *STAR TREK*—"the so-called Baby Boom generation, a generation that seemed to have a lot wider interest, and a lot more acceptance of fantasy themes, ghost themes, make-believe, science fiction—a whole range of otherworldly subjects."

King added, "I've heard people suggest that maybe it has something to do with the coming of the millennium, and that people are getting freaked out about angels, and ghosts and this other stuff. And I really have no idea if that's right or not. I just do what I do."

Acknowledging that he is always on the lookout for stalkers, the novelist admitted, "It's a strange society that we live in. Bob Dylan said, you give people a lot of knives and forks, they gotta cut something. There are a lot of whackos out there."

As for his earlier works, King said he has no plans to re-do any of them—even those already done as films or TV.

And yes, he admitted, he sometimes gets nightmares about a project he's working on. "Wouldn't you?" he laughed.

Writing for him, he said, "has always been a lifeline—a way out. When I'm writing, I'm never alone, because I go to that other place—and there are all kinds of interesting people to play with. New things to

continued on page 61

with the idea of a book of a family who's trapped in an amusement park, and there's an evil force that brings the animatronic creatures to life.

"He was having a hard time with that concept," Johnson continued. "He stayed at the Stanley, heard the story and thought, 'This is crazy. I'll trap the family in the hotel,' because he had seen a road sign saying 'ROADS CLOSED NOV-FEB.' It gave him the idea of the animatronic animals coming to life in the theme park so he thought, 'I gotta have that in this book. What would a hotel have?' So he came up with the topiary."

The Stanley Hotel was built in 1901 by F.O. Stanley, inventor of the Stanley Steamer automobile. Unlike Kubrick's expansive, \$11 million set, the Stanley is a more intimate structure. "It's claustrophobic," said Garris. "It's not the wide-open spaces; it's kind of a dowager of a hotel. It's small and beautiful, but it is enclosed. The sense that you're enclosed in this nearly Victorian mansion and caved in by snow is a claustrophobic experience. That was something that was represented in the book and really far from how Kubrick chose to make it."

More than half the film was shot at the Stanley, with additional stage work done in Denver, only an hour and a half away. Another way the filmmakers chose to remain faithful to King's novel was to find a cast that would more closely resemble the characters the author created, removing themselves from the portrayals of a whiny Shelley Duvall and an over-the-top Jack Nicholson.

"After we saw the movie," said Garris, "David Cronenberg said to me, 'You know, they cast the ending!' [Garris laughed]. I thought that was really well-put. Again, if you go back to the reviews, the main problem critics had was that Nicholson was so over-the-top from the beginning. He is a great actor, but there was a specific choice made on how to play their version of Jack Torrance. I think it's at odds with the book, but it's a perfectly valid choice for a filmmaker to make."

While each of the four main characters is crucial to the

DIRECTOR MICK GARRIS

"It was the most difficult casting process of my life!... We went through a lot of people who didn't want to be the first line of the review, being compared to Jack Nicholson."



Steven Weber as Jack Torrance, falling under the spell of the Overlook Hotel—filmed at King's original inspiration for the story, the Stanley Hotel in Colorado.

whole, the most important person in the group is undoubtedly Jack Torrance, whose escalating madness and dependence on the hotel's spirit world drives the story. Garris laughed about casting the role for his miniseries, an experience he recalled as, "the most difficult casting process of my life! I've been directing now for 11 years, and it was unbelievable. The first time it came up was in a conversation with Gary Sinese. I knew he had just come off of *FORREST GUMP* after *THE STAND*, and I was just taking to him about it. I said, 'You know, if you wanted to play Jack Torrance...' knowing that he was not in a place where he would at that time. He said, 'I don't think I'd like to step into Mr. Nicholson's shoes.' That should have been the warning! We went through a lot of people who didn't want to be the first line of the review, being compared to Jack Nicholson.

"A lot of really terrific people would have been great in it," Garris continued. "Then there were a couple of English actors who didn't have a problem with that and who could do an American accent, and they

kind of...screwed us! One of them we liked a lot and we were set to meet with him the weekend before shooting was to begin. Steve King and I came back from Denver to meet with him and he didn't show up for the meeting!

"We met Steve Weber and read him opposite Rebecca DeMornay, and he blew us away! I've never seen *WINGS* to this day, so I went in with the advantage of not having seen him as the goofy brother in a sitcom. I could not sing his praises more highly. I think this is going to surprise people and do a lot of good for him. He's also one of the most wonderful people in the world you could ever ask to work with."

Garris felt his job was to encourage Weber, whose acting background includes stage work and features (*SINGLE WHITE FEMALE*, *JEFFREY*), to portray Jack Torrance as Stephen King wrote the role, and not as a televised retread of Nicholson's wild-eyed mad man. "He's a versatile actor who really understands a character from

the inside out," Garris added about Weber.

Another keystone to the story is five-year-old Danny Torrance, a psychic nexus who barely understands his own abilities, let alone can comprehend the evil that saturates the Overlook Hotel. Danny Lloyd gave an admirable performance in Kubrick's film. The role is played by Cortland Mead this time around.

"He was great!" Garris enthused. "He read for us twice and was fantastic. He came back a third time so we could put him on tape to send to Steve King, and somebody had coached him badly! Suddenly he was acting like a TV actor. But he came back again and was just great. This is probably the most demanding role I have ever seen for a child. It's not like in the movie where he's silent, wiggles his finger and mumbles, 'Mrs. Torrance...' It is a very verbal role. He plays things from catatonia to joy to trying to hide that something is wrong by putting on a false face for his parents to keep them from worrying about him. There are very complex emotional issues he goes through. Cortland was up to it. This was a kid who turned nine in the middle of the shoot. He's an incredibly responsive and bright little boy. We had an acting coach named Dawn Jeffery-Nelson who I've known for several years. She was a big help to us by coming in and working with him during the hours I couldn't."

The late Scatman Crothers nearly stole Kubrick's show as Dick Halloran, one of the few elements of the novel that made it to the screen (until he was axed in the chest, that is). For *THE SHINING* TV's incarnation, filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles plays the elderly cook who shines his way through whatever walks the halls of the Overlook Hotel.

"I think Mel Van Peebles did a great job," said Garris. "His Dick Halloran is very different. It's not the same guy. He wears polyester, three-piece maroon suits that he's had probably since the disco days! He's really a snappy, sassy kind of guy."

Wendy Torrance may have gotten the worst shake in the feature film; the usually good

Stephen King's THE SHINING

DIRECTING THE MASTER

Mick Garris is back to helm another shocker.

By Frederick C. Szebin

Mick Garris has risen through the ranks rather nicely. The film school graduate who wrote for *Cinefantastique* way back in 1977 moved on to TV (*AMAZING STORIES*) feature films (*PSYCHO IV*, *CRITTER II*) and into the most successful miniseries of all time based on one of Stephen King's best-loved novels, *The Stand*. With his new version of *THE SHINING* (one hesitates to refer to it as a remake), Garris continues his association with possibly the most famous and powerful author of the 20th century. And he does it all with a touch of class and humor. "Don't be nervous

Garris on the set, his third collaboration with King, including *SLEEPWALKERS* and *THE STAND*.



talking to me," he said when I commented on talking to the man who brought *THE STAND* to fruition after its 12-year journey through pre-production hell. "Talking to me is like talking to your dog!"

Unlike the epic sweep of *THE STAND*, *THE SHINING* is a more intimate horror, showcasing a family trapped by snow and the unrelenting evil of an old hotel whose history refuses to remain in the past. "In every regard other than weather it's been the smoothest experience of my life!" Garris said of directing *THE SHINING*. "I always have pretty happy production experiences. It's great having the most successful miniseries of the last dozen years or so! In 1994, after the Oscars, the top four rated shows on television were *THE STAND*, *THE STAND*, *THE STAND*, and *THE STAND*!" Garris laughed. "That success made a big difference, not so much because of me, but because of Stephen King.

"To the network's and Warner Bros.'s credit, they were all extremely supportive," Garris continued. "This show, particularly the last hour, is pretty intense. In fact, I showed an approved cut to Clive Barker and he said, 'This is the most intense hour of any film I have ever seen for the big or little screen!'" said Garris. "I don't want to overstate the case, but we took things even further than *THE STAND* did."

THE SHINING miniseries promises to go even further than Stanley Kubrick's motion picture did by remaining true to the



Director Mick Garris rehearses Stephen King, who wrote the six-hour miniseries and retained casting approval as its executive producer.

source material and including scenes and events Kubrick ignored. One such element is the Overlook Hotel's topiary, sentient hedge animals used by the evil forces of the hotel to keep the Torrances in line. It was a difficult task to pull off such odd beings, but Garris feels, XFX, led by Steve Johnson, handled the creatures well.

"We really wanted the topiary to be as realistic as possible," Garris said. "As in the book, they don't move when you're looking at them. Well... sometimes the characters aren't looking at them. After four hours of this show we become a little more liberal with how they're moving," Garris laughed. "Some of it was puppeted and some was achieved with some really incredible CGI. We used CGI for some snow enhancement mattes as well. The CGI of the topiary is just a few shots, but they're well-chosen, I hope. They cost enough," he laughed, "so they better be! I think Steve [Johnson] was disappointed because a lot of the puppeted animals got cut, but I never intended to linger on the moving topiary in the first place. I want people to think, wait! Did that just move a little bit? Wasn't that in a differ-

ent position? It's mysterious until late in the show."

While *THE SHINING* is a character-driven story at its core, carefully chosen special effects not only enhance the drama of the characters' plight but, in some cases, enhanced the director's complications. Any time Jack has an experience with the topiary was a very complicated scene.

Noted Garris, "It's fairly simple as you watch it, and it's not that long, but they had originally scheduled it for half a day and we shot for three days!" he said. "It's sort of like a jigsaw puzzle. You can't shoot masters or film a scene through from beginning to end because so much of it changes in relation to the position of the topiary, where they are, what his reaction is—everything. And it's just one guy and these inanimate animals! You just have to shoot it like a jigsaw puzzle and put it together. It's very complicated to keep in your head, even though it was storyboarded. You can *draw* anything. Shooting it is another thing altogether.

"It gets complicated anytime you work with effects," Garris continued, "On the one hand, something I was worried about

being complicated, which was the ballroom full of ghosts dancing and all that, went fine. The bigger the scene, somehow the more simply it lays out. It was the same with *THE STAND*. We had the big scenes in Las Vegas with 600 extras and all that. I'd go to the set with knots in my stomach on these days, and they were the easiest, most fun scenes I'd ever shot in my life! It's very hard to build suspense with one guy and a couple inanimate objects when you can only shoot a piece at a time. It's difficult to describe why, only because no shot makes any sense on its own and it doesn't relate to the other shots whereas, for example, a dialogue scene gives you the coverage, and you pretty much try to do the same thing from several angles."

Garris enjoyed filming on location at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado, the gateway to the Rocky Mountains National Park. He doesn't believe the miniseries could have been filmed in Los Angeles because Denver and Estes Park offered their own ambiance, which sometimes proved problematic for a production whose dramatic structure relied on tons of snow.

"The Stanley Hotel was built there because it's in a snow shadow," said Garris. "That means it don't snow much! [he laughed] That was a nightmare. We lucked out and had a couple huge snowstorms that stuck around. Usually the snow is blown away almost immediately, but we did have tremendous luck as far as the production goes. Comfort is another thing altogether. There were nights we were shooting when it was four below zero, but it did allow us to get the visual stuff that is pretty breathtaking and that we couldn't have gotten otherwise. For example there are scenes we tried to do with fake snow, with the topiary that I was hoping to save in the editing room that I reshot when we had this enormous snowfall because it was so beautiful.

"It was difficult and challenging because of the weather," Garris continued. "Our schedule changed constantly. At least 50% of the time we weren't shooting what we had scheduled, but after *THE STAND*, anything is easy!" □

DIRECTOR MICK GARRIS

"There's nothing Hollywood about [Stephen King], thank God. We both kind of work outside the realm of Hollywood. It's a nice feeling. He is utterly without pretense."



Rebecca DeMornay as Wendy Torrance tries to understand her little boy and his fear of the hotel. DeMornay was King's first and only choice for the role.

Shelley Duvall was miscast in a wispy, squeaky-voiced role. Garris and King have worked to give viewers a more modern, strong woman in line with 1997. Stephen King's first choice for the role was Rebecca DeMornay and the actress accepted.

Stephen King appears in his traditional cameo in Jack's ballroom hallucination, where he sees ghosts and corpses in the throes of a masquerade ball. King plays bandleader Gage Creed (figure that one out, King fans!)

Part of what has made the Garris/King team so rewarding for them both is a mutual respect. That extended to casting, but the author retained casting approval.

"When it came down to somebody other than the leads, he would trust me," said Garris. "And even on the leads, we would just talk about it together. You're always saying, 'How about this?' 'Nah, that's not right.' We'd say that to each other. It's a two-sided thing. He's very collaborative, a unique, wonderful, non-bullshit guy. There's nothing Hollywood about him, thank God.

We both kind of work outside the realm of Hollywood. We don't surround ourselves with television and movie people all the time. It's a nice feeling. He is utterly without pretense."

In order to even legally film *THE SHINING*, Warner Bros. had to pay out what Garris referred to as "a rather enormous amount of money" to Stanley Kubrick for his non-involvement. Kubrick's original contract on the film had a sequel/remake clause that had to be financially fulfilled before the author could even begin work on a television version of the property he created.

Budgeted at \$21 million, the three-part, six-hour miniseries—four and a half hours without commercials—shot for 72 days on location in Estes Park and Denver, Colorado between February and June of 1996. Cast and crew lived on the set, taking rooms in the Stanley Hotel. It seemed almost appropriate that the very building which inspired one of Stephen King's best works seems to be a little haunted itself.

"We had freaked-out cast and crew members almost every

day the first week we were there," said Cynthia Garris, wife of director Mick Garris and a featured player in the miniseries, as the ghostly woman in room 217. "Steve Weber was on the fourth floor, which is supposed to be the real supernatural hot-spot and he moved out of his room after two nights. I don't know what he heard or saw, I just know that he was scared because he'd heard other people on the floor tell him what happened to them."

Dawn Jeffory-Nelson allegedly had voices whispering in her ear and her bed moved, apparently on its own volition. A set-builder moved out of the hotel entirely, and ghostly sounds from a room directly above the lobby were investigated to find a mysterious turning doorknob on the room's door and no occupants. The activity ceased after a week or so, whether it was a form of mass hallucinations, jolly prank-playing or the really quiet hotel suddenly besieged by visitors who inadvertently upset whatever walks the halls of the Stanley Hotel has never been discovered. But Cynthia Garris, a lifelong horror fan and brave soul, enjoyed the brief supernatural uproar which, she admitted, did have its lighter moments.

"Steve Weber was such a chicken!" she laughed. "Before he moved, Cortland Mead's mom went up and played a prank on him—she started pounding on his walls at two in the morning. The poor guy. It was a really fun shoot, like a college dormitory kind of pranks and just this feeling that maybe there was something there permeating every day's shoot. It was terrific!"

But not all was fun and games, particularly for makeup artist Bill Corso, who has worked with effects on such films as *LORD OF ILLUSIONS*, *SPECIES*, and *ERASER* and was, for the first time, head of an entire makeup department. This involved overseeing not only character makeups, but also the myriad of makeup effects, particularly the show-stopping ten-minute ballroom scene of 60 men and 60 women

Stephen King's THE SHINING

THE WOMAN IN ROOM 217

Cynthia Garris is persuaded to play a ghoul—again.

By Fred C. Szebin

"The woman in the tub had been dead for a long time. She was bloated and purple, her gas-filled belly rising out of the cold, ice-rimmed water like some fleshy island. Her eyes were fixed on Danny's, glassy and huge like marbles. She was grinning, her purple lips pulled back in a grimace. Her breast lolled. Her pubic hair floated. Her hands were frozen on the knurled porcelain sides of the tub like crab claws."

That's how Stephen King introduced one of the most chilling creatures in one of his best works, the ghostly woman of Room 217 from *The Shining*.

For his six-hour miniseries, director Mick Garris chose wife Cynthia for the small but pivotal role of the Overlook Hotel's supernatural nature manifesting itself. Mrs. Garris is no stranger to horror films or FX make-up, as a life-long horror fan having been a zombie in *THRILLER* and the giant-head supreme being in hubby's low budget effort, *CRITTERS II*. It was on that film that she nearly backed out of creative feature roles all together.

"That was torture!" she said of the beastie she performed for her husband. "I was really afraid to do the tests for *THE SHINING* because I'd become very claustrophobic after the *CRITTERS II* experience, so severely that I had to have therapy! [Garris laughed]. It took me years to get over that experience. For *THE SHINING* Billy Corso did a lot of applied makeup. It took about four hours to get into it, and it was never uncomfortable. It was very lightweight. I had lenses in and everything. It was a breeze!



Cynthia Garris, wife of director Mick Garris and the form under the makeup in *THE SHINING*, with Ruby Dee and her husband on the set of *THE STAND*.

"We had to beg Cynthia to do it," Corso said. "Everybody was real sweet to her. Steve Johnson and Mick were saying, 'Look, if it's going to make you uncomfortable, don't do it.' I was the only one who kept riding her saying, no, no, no, it's OK! Trust me. Just let me do it once and you tell me if it's bad. If it's bad, I'll take it right off. We did the test on her and everybody loved it. She said, 'This isn't so bad!'"

Garris had one ace up her sleeve that helped make the whole makeup experience a little easier: she had saved her mask from *CRITTERS II* so that she would never have to go through that stifling prosthetic process again, was preserved from cracking, aging and the very earthquakes that plague southern California. She handed the life mask over to Corso, who worked up a suitable latex look to represent the horrid apparition that walks through Room 217.

"He did something miraculous with Saran Wrap!" Garris

laughed in recalling the creation of her ghoulish counterpart. "I've never had it done to me before, and I don't know if anybody has ever tried it before. It seemed to me that it was an experiment of his. There was applied facial makeup that he sculpted from the life mask and a lot of painting. After he painted my face, arms, hands and feet he took Saran Wrap and glued it all over parts of my face, neck, chest, arms, hands and legs. After it dried, he just peeled it back with his thumb and made these wonderful sores. The flesh is literally hanging off me in parts. It's a wonderful effect. Once he dulled down the shine of the Saran Wrap it was really horrible looking!"

The idea developed from Johnson and Corso's use of plastic garbage bags on *SPECIES*. "We started using clear plastic garbage bags for a lot of the effects because it looked so amazingly real," said Corso. "Steve started slipping plastic bags into everything! We

did *LORD OF ILLUSIONS* with plastic bags, and Steve does episodes of *THE OUTER LIMITS* and *THE POLTERGEIST* using plastic bags for all these weird effects. It's so forensic looking, which is what we all like to do because it's so unsettling," Corso laughed.

Corso cited an episode of *THE OUTER LIMITS* in which Johnson had devised an effect with little pustules on a man's body with plastic bags filled with liquid as an inspiration for his look of the woman in 217.

"Even though we couldn't show her whole body," said Corso, "I wanted to have her look like she had been in the water for so long." In the book it's a fat, bloated, old lady. It's disgusting. Cynthia is a statuesque, gorgeous, thin woman, so we couldn't make her fat and bloated. I don't think we could have done it even if we had the money Rick Baker had on *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. We didn't want to cover her totally, we wanted to have as little on her as possible, so I thought, 'Hey man, I'll just put Saran Wrap on her and cover it in latex,' which when latex goes in the water it turns milky-looking and looks disgusting. When we actually did the makeup, I painted her whole body with tattoo paint, which stays on underwater and is the most amazing makeup ever. Then I put Saran Wrap on top of it, coated it with latex and you could see all the discolorations through the skin because of the Saran Wrap. A by-product of this is you get such a bizarre translucency to it. It looks so unsettling. I have pictures of her feet that I've shown doctors and they were sick! I'm so proud of these Polaroids I bring with me,



Garris as the woman in Room 217, makeup by Bill Corso for XFX, Inc. The actress had to overcome her fear of claustrophobic prosthetics to take on the role.

‘Hey, look at this!’” Corso cackled.

To add to the woman’s disturbing presence Cynthia Garris, in full makeup, was sunk in to a bathtub mixture of reddish-brown food coloring, shaving creme and fuller’s earth to simulate aretch-inducing concoction for the long-dead suicide victim to soak in, “I put lenses in Cynthia. They were Ruby Dee’s left over from THE STAND. She opens her eyes and looks at the little boy—it’s just completely disgusting,” said Corso. “It’s scary as hell. I hope it comes across as scary on television as it was shooting it. We were tripping just watching it.”

Director Mick Garris filmed his lady love for three days—two days in makeup, another day or so to depict the woman’s

suicide years earlier, then as a dressed-up ghost for the huge ballroom scene. It’s Garris appearance in Part II of the three-part miniseries that signals the beginning of the ghostly frenzy that ultimately overtakes the lives of the Torrances.

“Up until my scene there’s just a lot of eerie sounds, voice and little tidbits here and there, but nothing really heavy has happened,” said Garris. “I like that I get to kind of stand alone in Part II. Then in Part III is when all hell breaks loose between Jack, the hotel, Wendy and Danny. So I’m glad I’m kind of on my own in part II. It’s a very small part, but it is memorable. For its seconds on camera I think it packs a real wallop. For the first time in my acting career, people will remember seeing me!” □

MAKEUP SUPERVISOR BILL CORSO

“I went ahead and designed a really cool ghost look for everybody... We did 150 full prosthetic rotting-zombie makeups and I had just four or five assistants! It was just logistically insane.”

who begin as ghosts and deteriorate into ravaged corpses during Jack’s hallucination.

Corso was up to the challenge of his responsibilities, which were complicated by THE SHINING’s budgetary constraints. For all of its \$21 million price tag, the makeup crew were working under a TV movie-of-the-week contract that left them understaffed. The movie-of-the-week contract basically stated that you will be paid bottom of the barrel scale and if you don’t like it, you can very easily be replaced.

Corso accepted the assignment for the opportunity to not only head his own department, but to work with Garris once again since THE STAND proved to be such a fruitful and enjoyable experience. Normally a department head would have enough extra help to carry the day and get the stars and extras ready for the camera, but THE SHINING could not afford industry standards.

“The producers would only allow me four assistants to do what wound up being 150 fully made up, fully costumed guests all with detailed paint makeups and hair,” recalled Corso. “Any makeup artist will tell you that when you do a girl’s makeup her hair takes longer. And they

actually gave me more assistants than they gave the hair stylist! We would tell our producers, ‘Guys, we can’t do it.’ Mick wanted 150 men and women all in ballroom masquerade attire—elaborate costumes and makeups—and you’ve got waiters, waitresses, Stephen King and the Andrews Sisters! They’re living in the ’40s so everybody had to look period and then, on top of it all, that was just to shoot them looking normal for one day! We spent two days filming them as ghosts!

“I went ahead and designed a really cool ghost look for everybody, which was air-brushed,” Corso continued. “Stephen King referred to them as ‘the Carnival of Lost Souls.’ I wanted them to look really cool. On top of that, we did prosthetics where everybody turns into corpses! We did 150 full prosthetic rotting-zombie makeups and I had four or five assistants! It was just logistically insane.”

Materials were no problem, since Johnson covered their costs from XFX’s budget, but that left literally nothing for Corso to hire whatever crew he could. This is where it becomes great to have friends.

More than one miracle has

A ghost staff waits to serve Torrance, John Derbin as Derwent (l) and Stanley Anderson as Grady (r), makeups supervised by Bill Corso for XFX.





A gruesome-looking makeup test by Steve Johnson's XFX Inc., for one of the climactic ballroom apparitions.

been pulled off by calling in favors and Bill Corso needed his Red Sea of ghosts parted within three shooting days. Being a union picture, he couldn't have non-union L.A. artists working on the show, but since *THE SHINING* shot in Colorado, he was able to hire four non-union locals who were personally recommended by the granddaddy of them all.

"I could get kids who Dick Smith recommended, who wrote to him or took his mail-order course," said Corso. "Legally they weren't allowed to do any makeups. They were there to help things move along. One guy had blue hair! I don't think Dick ever met them. I started out with four of them. One of them flaked, I never met him. One of them was a kid who took days off from school to come up and help, and the one guy sculpted pewter because that's the only thing he can do artistically in Colorado, but he wants to be a makeup artist. I was lucky enough to get those guys to come and help out."

Corso also pegged Emmy Award-winning co-worker from *THE STAND*, Ashlee Peterson, *THE SANTA CLAUSE*, and *ALIEN IV* makeup artist Barry Kopor, *CHAPLIN*'S Jill Rockow and old buddy and three-time Academy Award-winner Ve Neil, who he bumped into in

the makeup store while stocking up for *THE SHINING*.

"She was making up Jack Nicholson in *MARS ATTACKS!* and had a week off," said Corso. "She said, 'I'll come and play!' I said, 'Really? I can't pay you any money.' She said, 'That's okay. It'll be fun!' We supervised *BATMAN AND ROBIN* and brought me in. It was three days of hell on *THE SHINING* and now she's getting even with me!" Corso laughed.

Final helping hands came from Rebecca DeMornay's personal makeup artist, Tracy Levy, Corso's right-hand-man on the project, Douglas Noe, and hair stylist Lisa Marie Rosenberg, who managed to bring five assistants of her own from Los Angeles.

Corso set up his makeup department in a few of the Stanley's rooms. He and his makeshift crew began the arduous task of getting costumes for people so that the makeup artists would know what look to give the partiers, getting hair and whiskers trimmed and primed to simulate 1940s fashion, and attempt to use the detailed, staggered schedule he and Rosenberg created for their tiny crew and multitude of extras.

"I was quite proud of the schedule," said Corso. "The system we set up was flawless. I wanted to impress Ve and Barry, these people who are tops in the field. I wanted to look like I knew what I was doing in my first big job as a department head. Well, it wound up going totally to pot within 20 minutes. All the extras started showing up at five a.m. and I was pretty confident that we'd have half of them done by lunch so that Mick could start shooting scenes. As long as I walked into the makeup room, Mick, our fabulous director who is the sweetest guy in the world, invited all his friends to be in the sequence—people we knew nothing about, like Frank Darabont and other directors. All these wonderful people just showed up to do cameos as ghosts or zombies!

"The schedule just immediately went to hell!" laughed Corso. "From that point on it was just 12 hours of straight in-

Stephen King's THE SHINING

APPRECIATING KUBRICK

A look back at the 1980 film of the King classic.

By John Schofer

"Who in the world do you think you are?"

A superstar? Well, right you are.

Well, we all shine on

Like the moon, the stars, and the sun..."

John Lennon
"Instant Karma"

When the film version of Stephen King's *THE SHINING* premiered in 1980, it opened with high expectations. At the helm was director Stanley Kubrick, a cinema legend for creating ground-breaking films like *DR. STRANGELOVE: OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB*, *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, and *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*. In the lead role of Jack Torrance, the tormented father and writer driven to murder his family by the haunted Overlook Hotel, was Jack Nicholson, one of the most acclaimed actors of the '70s. Along with breathtaking

sets, and the debut of the Steadicam (a device that allowed the filmmakers to follow actor Danny Lloyd's Big Wheels around the cavernous Overlook seamlessly), *THE SHINING* was poised to be, as the advertising contended, "A masterpiece of modern horror."

But when the film debuted, it opened to mixed reviews. Many critics (Stephen King among them) contended that Kubrick had "over-intellectualized" the horror film, draining it of any emotional impact. King described it (in *USA Today*) as "this great big gorgeous car with no engine in it." Critics drubbed Kubrick for using the brightly lit, wide open spaces of the hotel in favor of dark, narrow halls conventional to most horror cinema. His horror played to the psychological rather than the visceral.

They also pointed to Nicholson's performance, stating that Nicholson appeared to be insane

Stanley Kubrick lines up a shot on *THE SHINING*, his 1980 adaptation of King's book. It disappointed fans of the novel, and received a drubbing from critics.



KING ON KUBRICK'S FILM

“Many critics contended Kubrick had “over-intellectualized” the film, draining it of any emotional impact. King described it as “this great big gorgeous car with no engine in it.””

of the tour. He presents all the outward appearances of being a normal person, reassuring Mr. Ullman, the manager, that he will not succumb to cabin fever as an earlier caretaker had. Yet from what the viewer learns about Jack's past and the edginess Nicholson brings to the performance, the viewer feels that Jack Torrance is hanging on by a thread.

As the film progresses, and Jack becomes frustrated with

lips, the viewer believes that this man really fears that he is going crazy and will eventually hurt his family, and is terrified by the notion.

When Danny enters, bruised from his encounter in Room 237, Wendy immediately suspects Jack. She believes that he's gone back to his old ways. Here Kubrick focuses on a stunned Nicholson. The actor sits, clothes and hair disheveled, with a vacant look in his eyes. He raises a single questioning hand as the sharp music slices across the soundtrack.

Kubrick then follows Jack into the Gold Ballroom, where Torrance has his first direct contact with the Overlook's permanent staff. Jack has a conversation with Lloyd, the ghostly bartender, which seems apropos. Lloyd (actor Joe Turkel from *BLADE RUNNER*) encourages Jack to drink up, informing him that it is “orders from the house.”

At last, the viewer sees the hotel at work on Torrance's psy-

Danny Lloyd as Danny recoils in horror from an abusive father, Kubrick's shift in focus from the book.

his inability to write, we see that thread begin to fray. Ironically, though Jack is obsessed with being the Overlook's caretaker, he never does any maintenance. Wendy is the one who checks the boilers and keeps in touch with the Forest Service. Jack also becomes less and less a participant in his family. Instead, he stands back and watches Wendy (superbly played by a mousy Shelly Duvall) and Danny engage in family activities. Jack appears to envy the way they interact, and perhaps knows that he will never be fully trusted because of what he did to Danny earlier.

That becomes evident in a crucial scene in which Jack wakes “from the most horrible nightmare I've ever had.” He describes to Wendy how he dreamed that he'd butchered her and Danny with an ax. As Nicholson writhes on the floor, manic eyes darting about, drool dripping from his quivering

“I'm home!” Jack Nicholson's over-the-top performance cemented his screen persona. Shelley Duvall, preparing for Jack's entrance.



from the moment he stepped into frame, destroying King's vision of a normal family man slowly driven over the edge. Strangely enough, Kubrick's *THE SHINING* works for exactly the same reasons.

Because Kubrick shifts the emphasis to Jack Torrance, *THE SHINING* becomes a tale of domestic abuse, spurred on by the malevolent ghosts inhab-

iting the Overlook. Thus, Nicholson's performance fits. Instead of playing a normal man who becomes insane, Nicholson portrays a crazy man attempting to remain sane.

During his interview and subsequent tour of the Overlook, he often refers to how “homey,” or “cozy,” the hotel is. He wants to “collect my family” before moving on with the rest

The cast gathers to rehearse on cavernous sets of the Overlook built in London: (l to r) Nicholson, Scatman Crothers, Barry Dennen, Duvall and Barry Nelson.



che, by giving him, "the hair of the dog that bit me." The hotel caters to Torrance's weaknesses, and slowly pushes him to the brink he had been desperately trying to avoid. The film, then, becomes not one of surprise, but one of expectation. The outcome is inevitable and the viewer is forced to watch events run their course. In a sense, the viewer becomes a sadistic voyeur to domestic abuse



in those days). Instead, Kubrick uses a hedge maze, which serves as a visual metaphor for the film; father and son lost in a confusing world where the elements (in this case the bitter cold) work against them. Here again, Kubrick uses the Steadicam to create a smooth, seemingly endless subjective shot. Jack doggedly follows his son's footsteps (an ironic twist on the normal idea of fam-

Nicholson and the ghostly temptress of Room 237, Lia Beldam. L: The rotting corpse of the girl in Room 237, makeup by Christopher Tucker. R: The Grady girls' ghosts who beckon Danny to stay with them "forever and ever."

and matching blue dresses and say very little, but their appearance speaks volumes. Without any elaborate special effects, Kubrick lets the audience know they are ghosts merely by their strange demeanor and unsettling stares. Combined with the creepiest soundtrack ever put on film (using the works of composers Bela Bartok, Gyorgy Ligeti and Krzysztof Penderecki), Kubrick creates terror subtly.

Kubrick makes the mundane creepy. The horror is set in the bright lights of a seemingly normal hotel. Yet the vast, vacant labyrinth-like halls (which parallel the hedge maze) seem somehow claustrophobic. The viewer feels isolation in what should be a safe, bright environment. The best example is when Danny plays with his toy trucks in one of the hallways (the patchwork carpet also resembles a maze) and a ball rolls slowly into frame. When Danny looks up, he sees the hallway

spread out before him, bright, wide, but eerily silent and empty. In another scene, he rides his Big Wheels through the halls and turns the corner to come face to face with the Grady girls who would like him to stay with them "forever, and ever, and ever."

Kubrick also knows how to get the viewer to biting their nails. Toward the climax, Danny awakens and moves, slowly, around the living quarters to write "Redrum" on the bathroom door, while the music throbs like a heartbeat. Credit, too, (as throughout the film) the late John Allcott's cinematography. He used the available light from table lamps to cast long shadows around the room, turning the once "cozy" place into a dark, foreboding space.

The climax, itself, differs from the book because Kubrick was unable to create the topiary creatures back in 1980 (computer effects were limited to Space Invaders and 7-Up commercials



ily where the son stereotypically follows in the father's footsteps), chasing through the icy blue glow thrown up by lights positioned along the bottoms of the maze walls, while the disjointed music reaches a frenzy.

In the end, Kubrick pays off his theme of evil men giving in to their nature despite their best efforts, by a slow push-in through the hotel lobby to a photo of a smiling Jack standing among party-goers in 1921. It suggests that evil (like domestic abuse) is cyclical and eternal. The Overlook destroyed Jack Torrance because it was meant to. It exists to cater to the demons within people, and to push them along if need be.

Ultimately, the original film version of THE SHINING belongs to Stanley Kubrick, not Stephen King. Herein lies the rub, as Shakespeare would say. Kubrick set aside King's emotional impact of monsters around every corner, in favor of a monster who sits down at the dinner table with you. But Stephen King would like a car with the engine running hot (rather than checking to see if the first car's engine wasn't in the back), and, after all, what does Stanley Kubrick know about cars? □

and is helpless to look away.

The focus of Jack's manic rage is Danny, wonderfully played by Danny Lloyd. In Kubrick's film, Danny is a withdrawn, almost autistic child. His "accident" at the hands of his father spurred his first experience with Tony and the first appearance of his gift for "shining." That horrible experience, and the subsequent one in Room 237, causes Danny to retreat within himself and allow Tony to deal with the terror of reality.

In the middle of all this is Shelley Duvall's Wendy, an every-woman who is the only "normal" member of the family. She's left to make sense of her deranged husband and psychic son (not an easy undertaking). Yet, in the end, she displays surprising resilience when Jack eventually comes knocking at the door with an ax (which would tend to motivate most people).

Of course, this may all seem as if Kubrick really did over-intellectualize THE SHINING, but he also managed to create an incredible atmosphere of dread and horror. One of his most effective techniques was the presence of Delbert Grady's daughters. The twin girls appear hand-in-hand with pale faces

Scatman Crothers came close to stealing the movie as psychic cook Dick Hallorann, to the rescue in a snow cat, for Kubrick just a red herring.



sanity which, on the first day, ended up with all of us at the bar of the hotel, getting sloshed and saying, 'We're not going to make it tomorrow!' We said, 'Honey, I've been doing this for years and I've never worked this hard in my life! You're killing me!' She did 40 makeups. All of us were just exhausted. I airbrushed seven women at one time; I had them all lined up in a row and I'd do one color on all of them, then I'd do the next color. I went into the other room and Barry Kobor was doing the same thing."

The second day was easier for the makeup artists, since the cameos had finished on the first day, and 60 extras had been sent home. By lunchtime, Corso and his crew were able to kick back. The third day was prosthetics day, in which Jack's ballroom hallucination turns dark and the surrounding ghosts deteriorate before him.

"There's a scene where at the end of one of the big dance numbers the ghosts start to deteriorate," said Johnson. "Stephen King plays the bandleader. We did a prosthetic makeup on him that was rigged to deteriorate. We had some real deep negative areas sculpted into the prosthetic where he's missing an ear, part of his lower jaw, cheek bone and his lower lip. Those were sculpted so they didn't exist. We applied prosthetic to him and had a series of tubes that pumped air and flesh-colored ooze.

"Before we did that," Johnson continued, "we applied the prosthetic and buttered back in a thick mixture of methacellulose. We resculpted the jaw, lower lip, cheekbone and ear in this mixture, then filled all our tubes with flesh-colored ooze. We pumped liquid and air through them so that these predetermined areas would liquefy and slide off. Stephen really enjoyed that. We did that on two performers, and we also built a dummy head that we could deteriorate a little bit further."

What the makeup artists concocted, based on King's screenplay, made Corso compare ABC's *THE SHINING* to HBO's *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*. "Steve Johnson knew we did a lot of really great stuff that looked really neat," he said.

MAKEUP SUPERVISOR BILL CORSO

"The schedule just immediately went to hell! From that point on it was just 12 hours of straight insanity which, on the first day, ended up with all of us at the bar of the hotel..."



Steven Weber as Jack Torrance, a flawed but likeable man driven mad by the hotel's demons—played as absolutely true to King's book as possible.

"But even when standing there and shooting it you're thinking, 'I can't believe they're going to let this be shown on TV.'

"It was pretty intense stuff," Corso continued. "Stephen King's ear is sliding off with puss squirting out, and he's screaming as his lips are coming off! And it looked great! But I think Mick was honest in saying cutting some of the effects had nothing to do with how great it was, and even the censors would have allowed a certain amount of it. But the effects didn't work in the pacing of some of the sequences. When everything is coming to a close, it didn't make sense to throw those things in there."

Garris left an abbreviated form of the melt-down sequence in the final film, basing his editing decisions on aesthetic choices rather than having Standards and Practices, TV's censorial arm, dictate cuts. According to all involved, network censors pretty much left the production team to its own device, the main reason being that ABC very simply wants to maintain a friendly relationship with Stephen King. They turned their backs on corpses, stab-

blings, bloodletting and various other horror devices to keep Maine's favorite son happy.

The censors did, on occasion, raise an objection, but Garris found himself pretty free to explore avenues of violence as he saw fit. "They asked for far more than they ended up getting," Garris said. "We did make a few changes. Standards and Practices was concerned, but they also did not want to alienate King. We're making a Stephen King book, one of his most famous and well-loved books. It's an intense story that is violent. In my opinion, violence is supposed to be repellent in the truest sense unless you're doing fantastic violence, and by that I mean the root word 'fantasy' where it can stimulate the 'wow' response. When it's grounded in real-world violence, it should be repulsive. It shouldn't be easy to take. It should make you wince, and I hope it does! I think cleaning up violent scenes for television gets you exactly the opposite response; it shows that there is no result to violence—like hitting someone with a bottle and he gets up seconds later with no problem. Violence should hurt,

not be presented in a delightful, simple light."

Throughout the last hour of its final night, *THE SHINING* is full of woundings, batterings and blood as Jack Torrance finally goes over the edge and attacks his family with a croquet mallet. It was this reality-based violence that censors objected to the most, particularly in the beginning of Jack's attack on Wendy when he wallops her in the stomach with the mallet.

"When that happens," said Garris, "all bets are off. Anything can happen in this movie. When that slams into her stomach, that's when it all starts to fall down. They wanted to cut that. There's another point where she's protecting herself with a razor blade and inflicts a couple of slashes. They wanted the second slash cut, which we did. We made it an off-camera slash. The croquet mallet in the stomach wasn't cut. There were several hits, but the first was the main one. They knew that they didn't want to ask for too many changes, so they asked for a very small handful. We knew that we were making something for television, but we wanted to go as far as we could to make the point. We were reasonable about it; nobody was drawing a line in the sand. The last hour is where it really has to take off. You can't minimize this. We would always give them reasons for what we shot."

For their part, XFX avoided dark fluids and blood colors for their melting corpses, which gave the ballroom scene more of a surreal quality rather than gore. A survivor of Garris' eventual cuts was a young woman who essentially plays Rita Hayworth, movie goddess of Hollywood's Golden Age. Johnson devised what Corso referred to as "a killer effect! She's dancing with Weber, being seductive and sexy. She smiles at him and her lips split open. When she stops smiling it just goes away. It was an amazing appliance. I let Ve Neil do it because if you're going to have a three-time Academy Award-winner on your crew, let her do a really cool makeup. It's a really twisted throwaway gag."

Stephen King's THE SHINING

MELVIN VAN PEEBLES

The urban writer / director / actor experiences nature shock as Dick Hallorann in the Colorado locale.

By Frederick C. Szebin

A star of stage, screen, TV and the printed word, Melvin Van Peebles (father of Mario) seems to be spending his life successfully going in several directions at once. An author of five novels, he's been published in English and French. One of his books became the basis for his first film, 1968's *THE STORY OF A THREE DAY PASS*, about a black soldier and a white French girl. In 1970, he directed the overlooked feature *WATERMELON MAN*, in which a white racist wakes up as a black man. Then, in 1971, he privately financed, directed, scored, edited and starred in the X-rated *SWEET SWEET-BACK'S BAADASSSSSS SONG*, which struck a chord with urban blacks at the beginning of the so-called Blaxploitation era. As an actor, Van Peebles has appeared in *TRUE IDENTITY*, *BOOMERANG*, and *POSSE*, and completed directorial and acting chores on Mario's upcoming Showtime special when he decided to take a break from directing and accept jobs as an actor for a while.

A call came from *THE SHINING* production office asking if Van Peebles would be interested in reading for the part of psychic cook Dick Hallorann. The actor was pleased for the chance to take part in Stephen King's newest TV epic, having already familiarized himself with the novel and previous film version.

"The book cannot be encapsulated in an hour and a half, or even a two-hour film," Van Peebles said of *THE SHINING'S* previous cinematic incarnation. "That's probably why King didn't make it as another movie because you really need the six hours to bring it to fruition. For example, the role I play is completely different from the movie. In the movie, he walks in and dies! If he has premonition, how can he walk into that? A lot of things in the movie didn't fit together. Although it might have been amusing and a *tour-de-force* directorially, the movie didn't make a whole lot of sense and didn't have any of the humanity that Mick's mini-series has."



Van Peebles as Dick Hallorann, the Overlook's psychic cook, who comes to the aid of Danny (Cortland Mead).

Van Peebles took on the project because of that very humanity inherent in King's characters. As for differentiating his version of Dick Hallorann from the portrayal of the late Scatman Crothers, Van Peebles joked, "No, I'm not that intelligent. Let's just say I don't have that much of an acting ego. The people in the movie were more like caricatures because there was less time for the story. For the characters in the mini-series, we could slow down. It's like the difference between working in theater, film or television; each one has a different size requirement. The time allotment for television gives you more space so you don't have to be so much of a caricature. The movie was on a much higher-strung tone. *The Shining* is a very character-driven piece. You also need that extra time to understand the character of the hotel, which did not play a very significant part in the movie."

The New York-based actor admitted to having a difficult time on the Colorado location, which provided the city dweller with just a tad of nature shock. "In Colorado they say if you don't like the weather, don't worry,

it's going to change in a minute. There were many different things about this shoot. One is you don't often live on the set. We were living in the hotel where we were shooting. That was quite interesting, but everybody really was of good will. You didn't have a lot of bitching. The weather, which we were guaranteed would be deep snow, didn't come, and when they got the ice machines out the snow came!" Van Peebles laughed.

"The first day I got to this huge hotel," Van Peebles continued, "it was late at night and real quiet. I looked out at this wonderful vista of mountains, and I glance down and see burglars creeping up to the hotel. I thought, 'Jesus, you think you can get away from that!' I picked up the phone to call the receptionist and I realize they're elk!" He laughed. "So much for being a city boy!"

Sticking close to the novel's narrative, Dick Hallorann rides in on a snowmobile to save the Torrances from the supernatural forces dividing them. Van Peebles was checked out on the snowmobile, something he'd never ridden before, but took to it after initial awkwardness. Working with XFX'S mechanical topiary creatures posed no problem for the actor either, although he admitted to having other things on his mind, such as, "Jesus, I'm cold!"

Of the creative team of director Mick Garris and Stephen King, Van Peebles had nothing but good to say. "Mick is the milk of human kindness," Van Peebles said of his director. "I had very good vibes from him. He's very solicitous. Stephen King was around a lot. He's marvelous. He enjoyed himself, saying things like, 'Look at this! Wow! That's wonderful!' He's not blasé at all.

"I would say to him, 'How do you want it?' He would say, 'That's just fine. Just like that! It's great!' I was lucky enough to have a handle on the character. The only changes I made were in syntax. I would say, 'This is not the word this guy would use. This is a new English word.' No problem. A lot of times you have a swell time on a shit movie, but what I've seen of this looks great." □

THE SHINING, Corso promised, has a lot of such throwaway gags as the Overlook flexes its supernatural muscles. Jack Torrance, though, needed particular attention. His character goes from Mr. Nice Guy to alcoholic to a raving lunatic. In the novel, King refers to Jack at the end as becoming the very shape of evil. Jack, even with Danny watching, removes the last vestiges of his humanity by bashing his own face into a bloody pulp with the croquet mallet. While the TV production couldn't go that far, Corso worked with Steven Weber on a variety of lunatic looks for the actor to use while sliding his character into a final madness.

As director, Garris left each department to its own devices. Corso recalled just walking new makeups onto the set and Garris calling, "Action," pleased with a look he had no input on. For Weber, Corso added subtle makeups to the actor to enhance his character's madness. It was a collaborative effort between the actor and the makeup man as Corso discovered a kindred spirit in Weber.

"He is such a big fan of Lon Chaney," Corso said of Weber. "I bought him all these Lon Chaney books. Through the whole shoot we were doing Lon Chaney stuff. He's such an admirer of the fact that Chaney did all these makeups on himself to become each character. Unlike actors today, who look the same in every movie, Chaney looked completely different every time. He was a million different actors. That's what Steven liked about it. He said, 'Wouldn't it be great to have that versatility at your fingertips? He really wanted to give the Shape its own presence, in addition to the acting.'

"As Jack starts going crazy," Corso continued, "he and his wife get in this big fight and she smacks him with one of the croquet balls. Through the end of the book and script, he's described as a mass of blood. Weber really wanted to smash Jack's face in. He said, 'Come on. Let me do it! It'll be so great!' He was coming up with ideas on how to do it. He said, 'We'll get a head that looks like me and we'll fill it with bloody

MAKEUP SUPERVISOR BILL CORSO

"[Weber] said 'We'll get a head that looks like me and we'll fill it with bloody stuff and we'll mash it with the mallet!' The two of us were like little kids throughout the movie."



Cortland Mead as Danny in the halls of the Stanley Hotel. Right: Jack, the abusive father, turns demonic.



stuff and we'll mash it with the mallet! We'll put a skull in it so that it cracks and everything!" Corso recalled laughing, "The two of us were like little kids throughout the whole movie. We'd go Go-Cart racing every night and discuss how screwed up we were going to make him look the next day. It was just such a pleasure."

Corso designed subtle appliances he figured Garris never even knew about; the makeup artist started adding to Weber's face as Jack got more and more demented. Steven Weber's boy-next-door good looks were suddenly turned into the face of an evil psychotic by degrees. Contacts with tiny pupils and blood-shot whites were added as, by the end of THE SHINING's final hour, Weber's face is covered with tiny appliances to make him look insane, gaunt, haggard and swollen with broken teeth.

"Steven plays it so well,"

said Corso. "It's a credit to his acting. I hope he becomes a huge movie star after this because he's just brilliant. He makes the whole movie; he's amazing to watch. In the original film, Nicholson just had to smile, which is a testament to his character. But Weber wanted to play the book because it's written so well. To not do it the way it's written is kind of sad because you read it and think, 'This is such a great story.' And the book is such a great movie. It's written like a movie, and it's got the most cinematic ending with the hotel blowing up. You think, 'My God. Why didn't Kubrick do that?'

"I didn't read the book before I saw the movie," Corso continued. "I didn't know anything about the book. At first, I didn't understand why Mick and Steve would want to remake it. I figured people are going to ask the same question. I

wanted to have an answer, so I read the book and thought, 'The book is great! Why didn't they do this?' Then I understood. If you read the book, then you understand why they're doing the miniseries."

Like the other Novels for Television, THE SHINING miniseries remains remarkably faithful to the novel, although small changes are inevitable when adapting the internal sources of literature to the external forces of film. Garris doesn't see any particular scenes from the novel being dropped, but the director did have a challenge in fitting the film he shot into the time constraints of network television.

"You always want to have 10 maybe 15 minutes of extra footage for what turns out to be 90-some minutes to play with in editing, to tighten it up," said Garris. "Well, Part One was two and a half minutes over, with Part Two over by 23 minutes and Part Three at 13 minutes over. The nightmare was, 'Oh my God! What are we going to

do with Part One?' We couldn't shift one part into the beginning of the next. It was an interesting balancing act. I knew we were going to lose a lot of things that got cut from Part Two, but other things were really difficult decisions to make. That is really more along the line of the changes made in the adaptation."

I don't think I lost anything I really liked," Garris continued. "There were certainly scenes I liked that weren't crucial to the telling of the story. It's been so long now that I'm used to it. It feels better! I wish that there had been some stuff up front, because this had the opposite structure of THE STAND, which started out by grabbing you by the throat. THE SHINING is sort of like winding the clock for the first two hours; we're just laying the groundwork for what's to come when it eventually blows up. It makes me a little ner-

vous to not have as much 'play' in Part One. The people are so good and the story is so strong that so far nobody has complained about it yet, but Part One is definitely the most quiet part."

At some point in the future, Garris and King may adapt the author's recent novel *Desperation*, but the filmmaker noted that it is important for him to make his next film away from King. He keeps an open eye for feature film projects. "I'd rather do great television than bad movies," he said. "But I'd rather do great movies than great television."

"Something I've been thinking a lot about is the main job of the director. I think it's to find, encourage and allow the best people to do their best work. Every time I've made a show, I've had better people than I deserve. On *THE SHINING*, the cinematography by Shelley Johnson is better than most feature films. The production design by Craig Stearns was fantastic. I had a great cast and crew. I really couldn't imagine a better one. I would be remiss in not giving them credit. Of course, if you don't like the show it won't matter! If you do, it's because so many talented people really gave more than they had to. And if you don't like it, it's my fault." □

Weber enthusiastically pushed for King's original ending, in which Torrance smashes his own skull.



Stephen King's THE SHINING

THE TOPIARY

Steve Johnson and his XFX crew bring the hedge animals to life.

By Frederick C. Szegin

"Staring at the hedge animals, he realized something HAD changed while he had his hand over his eyes. The dog had moved closer. No longer crouching, it seemed to be in a running posture, haunches flexed, one front leg forward, the other back. The hedge mouth yawned wider, the pruned sticks looked sharp and vicious. And now he fancied he could see faint eye indentations in the greenery as well. Looking at him."

For those familiar with the book, Stanley Kubrick's omission of the possessed hedge animals from his feature film version of *THE SHINING* is rather glaring. Portrayed in the novel as the Overlook's resident sentries, the topiary creatures are an eerie creation, not moving if you look directly at them until the end when all bets are off and there is no longer any need for supernatural cloak and dagger.

Creating the topiary for King's new miniseries version proved to be "pretty insane" for Steve Johnson and his XFX crew. Topiary supervisor Bob Newton and his crew were given four weeks to design, develop and build the leafy beasts before filming began on location with the hedge creatures first before the cameras.

"We had about 12 full-sized topiary animals," said Johnson. "We didn't have a lot of time, and we really didn't know the functions that would be neces-



XFX fabricator Biate Eisele with a second stage topiary lion head under construction.

sary, so we had to make them fairly universal. We did four lions—and these are pretty big, larger-than-life lions—two rabbits, two dogs and two cows. Probably the single most difficult piece was a walking lion.

"We built a lion suit for a performer to wear," Johnson continued. "It was more like a device than a suit because we put a guy in a harness and strung him from an overhead beam with pulleys so that he could walk as a quadruped. He had a fully remote control head with remote jaw functions. That was pretty difficult because we didn't want the human form to intrude on the lion form. The joints for a lion move at different places than human joints do. Basically, this guy—Patrick Garity—got into the device and operated it from inside. The head was fully remote, but he pretty much pushed, pedaled and pulled in order to get it to move in the proper places, and it was pretty damn startling.

Very, very effective."

In order to get the topiary animals completed on time, as well as develop dozens of ghost and corpse makeups for the mini-series' major ballroom hallucination scene, Johnson had to farm out some of the actual building of the hedge creatures to former partner Todd Masters—who handled the fabrication and design of the lion suit—and Alternate Anatomy, which had to make burn versions of the bush beasts out of real plant material. Fake plant material was

used for the moving animals since they had to last so long in the Colorado winter, but their burning counterparts, reserved for the show's conflagrating finale, had to be constructed from actual plants to avoid the noxious fumes that would have been caused by the falsified beasts.

The topiary animals proved particularly difficult for XFX. Johnson realized fans of the book would be waiting for the leafy creatures, and he didn't want to let them down. But as work progressed, the effects supervisor began, for the first time in his prolific career, to doubt the effectiveness of what they were building.

"Normally," he stated, "we build photo-realistic creatures using animatronics, prosthetics, that kind of thing. To get a scare, you know how to do it; you fall back on standard techniques of physiogamy and everything you've learned about what makes people



Steve Johnson's XFX topiary crew on location at the Stanley Hotel, (l to r) Steve Johnson, Patti Newton, lion suit performer Pat Gerrety, topiary designer Bob Newton and motion coordinator Sandey Grinn. Fabricators Blate Eisele (l) and Eve Neimand constructing lion.

afraid. When I walked into the shop in the morning and saw those big, fuzzy plant animals I just could not imagine them being frightening! It was pretty scary because I didn't know if we would pull it off. Of course, that really is up to how it's shot and edited, which I had to defer to [director] Mick [Garris].

"As far as the design goes," Johnson continued, "we went pretty straightforward. We considered going very surreal with them, but we ended up not taking the chance. They look pretty much like what you might expect topiary animals to look like; simplified versions of real animals. One thing we did do—as the animals approach Danny, as we see them more and more in the film, we made more defined, more frightening replaceable heads for each of them. We used pretty nondescript plant animal heads in the beginning, but as they start moving we made them look progressively scarier."

Besides the walking lion, two other fully mechanical rigs were built with cable-controlled legs and heads. Operated from large booms, these devices could take a few steps and shift their weight. A few CGI shots by Boyd Shermis (*SPEED*, *BATMAN FOREVER*) were incorporated to further enhance the movements of the plant creatures, but the crew relied mostly on the details built into their beasts, as well as a few

touch ups from Mother Nature.

"One really lucky thing happened," Johnson said. "It was so cold there and snowing much of the time when we shot the topiary sequences. On the first night we left them out all night. We woke up, went out to shoot and all the lions had their mouths wide open. The snow had melted in their mouths and froze back as icicles so that they all ended up with these mouths full of razor-sharp icicle teeth, which was a really good bonus. It ended up making them look really creepy and neat.

"A really hard logistical problem was trying to figure out how to move these things because they're very, very big animals," Johnson continued. "If you're familiar with the story, they don't move when you're looking at them, so we progressively would have to go in and change their poses as though

they're stalking Danny while he's building his little snow fort. The problem was we have a pristine snowfield with something like 12 topiary animals that have to be in progressively different poses. How the hell do you get in there without ruining

fire!" He laughed. "It was so cold, that I couldn't even tell!"

As human and leaf beast joints began to freeze, it became increasingly more difficult for Johnson and his crew to keep up with the challenges facing them. "We had a pretty startling night shot with two animatronic lions toward the end," Johnson recalled. "As Dick Hallorann's snow cat comes into view, one of the lions just slowly turns its head and the other one turns its head and crouches as if it's about to pounce. It was a pretty complicated animatronics shot, very difficult to pull off. We were having major troubles because of the cold. Everyone was freezing and in a bad mood, and we just decided to simplify the shot to get it done. I was very disappointed because I really wanted to get the one lion to crouch. That was the part we were going to simplify; we were just going to have both of their heads move.

"I went inside to take a break and warm up," Johnson continued. "My brain basically thawed out and I figured out how to make the lion crouch! I went back out to Mick and told him how we could get the shot. And we did it. I learned a valuable lesson; when you're in a circumstance like that, sometimes just standing away from it for just a few minutes will help you think clearer. It truly is like being in a battle when you're in a situation like that." □

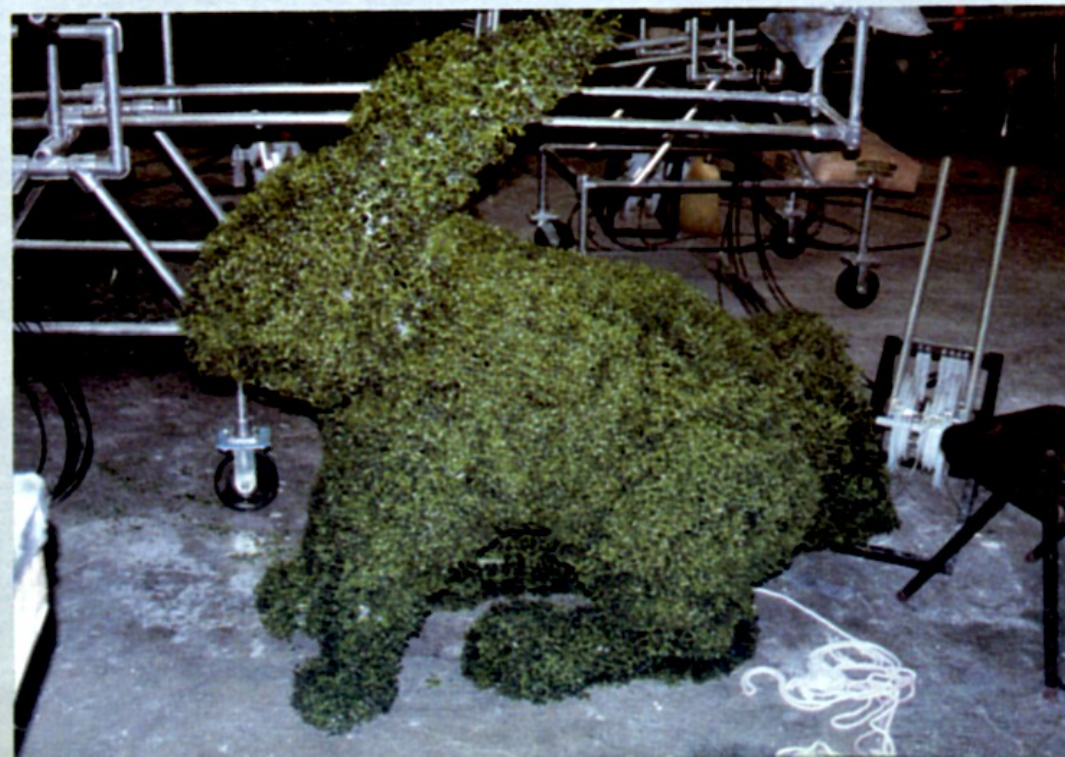
STEVE JOHNSON

"I went inside to take a break and warm up. My brain thawed out and I figured out how to make the lion crouch! Sometimes just standing away from it will help you think clearer."



the snow to move these enormous animals that weigh about 200 pounds each? It was one of the hardest things we did! We had to lift people with cranes. When we ended up with footprints we couldn't avoid, we had an ice chipping machine that we would cover them with."

The Colorado cold proved particularly difficult, which could reach 18-below at three in the morning when the production team would be in front of the Stanley Hotel, trying to manipulate their topiary in two feet of snow. "At one point," said Johnson, "I went over to the gas heaters to get warm. I looked down and my parka was on



XFX's topiary rabbit. Mechanic Kevin Reter constructing frame. The challenge: make the cute hedge animals menacing during filming.



AEON FLUX

Peter Chung on creating MTV's avant garde anime.

By Dan Persons

So, who's the double agent here? Beautiful, deadly Aeon Flux is a freelance spy, a leather-clad operative waging a private war of terror, assassination, and sabotage against the totalitarian nation of Bregna. Native of neighboring Monica—a land ruled by the precepts of benevolent anarchy and total, personal freedom—Aeon gives her days over to her career as high-priced dominatrix and fetish model, her nights to

Aeon, fleshed out for action in the as yet unreleased CD-ROM game version, finished but awaiting marketing decisions.



subverting automated border security systems, blowing up government installations, and dispatching high-placed members of the Breen ruling class.

Trevor Goodchild is her nemesis. Leader of Bregna—having achieved his post through the traditional means of subterfuge and murder—he rules his people with equal doses of intimidation and disinformation, all the while reveling in the perks enjoyed by those who dwell in the upper levels of the Bregnan social strata. When he is not busy manipulating his people, he applies his intellect to an unending series of megalomaniacal schemes, commandeering the bulk of his country's scientific resources to further his power-mad ambitions.

Okay, looks like we've got the standard spy-thriller scenario going here: cool, ruthless good-guy; even cooler, ruthless villain. But wait a minute, take a closer look: Aeon may appear near-invincible with her jet-black body armor and sub-machine pistol, but in truth she is startlingly fallible. She jumps to conclusions where closer observation would prove profitable, succumbs to emotions where dispassion would save the day. She's prone to unexpected bouts of awkwardness, her agility decaying into flat-out pratfalls at the worst possible moment. She botches as

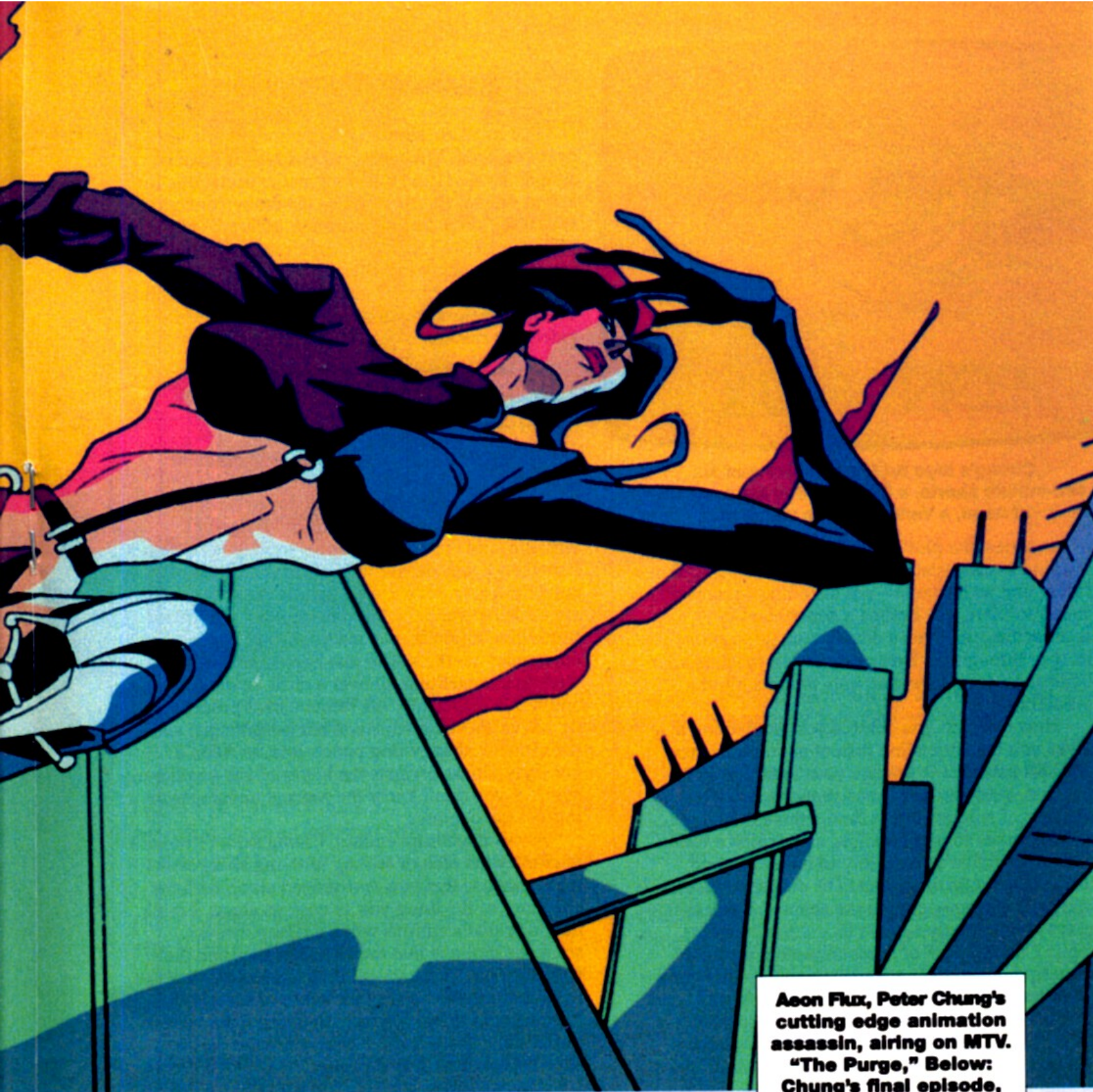


many missions as she completes. She's occasionally, gratuitously sadistic. She has died several times.

Trevor, meanwhile, wears the mantle of despot at best uneasily. Possessed of a high-flown set of personal ideals, he frequently tries to reconcile his government's compulsion for social control against his own higher moral imperatives, often resulting in social systems that hurt the very people they're supposed to benefit. His scientific ambitions stem from lofty impulses, but too often devolve into self-parody as they bump up against the reality of baser, human needs. He is a philosopher who tends to misquote Nietzsche, a one-minute manager so conflicted that he can simultaneously praise a subordinate's initiative and then order the poor bastard to go out and kill himself.

Oh, and by the way, he's never been able to kill Aeon Flux, just as she has never quite managed to dispatch him. And they probably never will. Blood-rivals though these two may be, they are also—impossibly, hopelessly—in love.

And isn't this just the kind of thing you'd expect to find on MTV, the cable network best known for its liberal lashings of Bon Jovi, Beavis and Butt-Head, and Alanis Morissette screaming riot girl rages while counting up her residuals? Sure, AEON



“Filmmakers often make the mistake of believing in their own fictions too much. I strive for a meshing of form and content.”

—Director Peter Chung—

FLUX has all the trappings of the teen-couch-potato come-on: the bondage gear; the bizarre sex; the science-fiction settings and overheated violence. But youths stepping into Aeon's realm expecting little more than some quick, visceral jollies find out soon enough that creator and frequent director Peter Chung does not hold much truck with a passive viewership. Turns out *nothing* is clear-cut in the AEON FLUX universe: not morality, not logic, not even the act of watching the show itself. Storylines are derailed, audience sympathies are shifted, even the standard precepts of film narrative are mocked. A spoof of spy-thriller spoofs, AEON FLUX layers on the subversion until the viewer can't help but wonder if he himself hasn't become the show's ultimate joke.

“Filmmakers often make the mistake of starting to believe in their own fictions too much,” said Chung about AEON FLUX's

Aeon Flux, Peter Chung's cutting edge animation assassin, airing on MTV. “The Purge,” Below: Chung's final episode, a knock-out masterpiece, as the Custodian is removed from the body of a Breen victim.



EPISODE GUIDE

Well and good to come up with one of television's most seductive enigmas; just try keeping the mystery intact while holding on to your viewership. "It's been frustrating for me," admitted AEON FLUX creator Peter Chung, "because on the one hand I want to actually encourage viewers to create their own interpretations, but at the same time, it doesn't mean that those questions have not been resolved in my own mind. I start out knowing exactly who is doing what and why, and I try to convey that in a way that's... well, maybe I shouldn't say clear, but I do make attempts to communicate that information to the viewer. I guess it's a fine line between what point you're giving up too much information, and what point you're giving too little... I prefer to err on the side of ambiguity."

Gut instinct aside, Chung was quite accommodating in clearing up some of the more prominent questions about AEON FLUX's frequently surreal adventures. Even with the help of the show's creator, though, there are mysteries that remain unresolved, either because they occur in such abundance that there was no time to cover them all (we *do* have a life, you know), or because, well, some questions just cannot be answered. To help you unravel the perplexities of the war between Monica and Bregna, we have added, wherever applicable, two sections: **QUESTIONS RESOLVED** and **ETERNAL MYSTERIES**. Feel free to use them as source material for group discussions.

NOTE: MTV regularly takes it on the chin for having given the world the likes of BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD. In case we haven't mentioned it before, though, the network has always been at the forefront in supporting the experimental and dramatic uses of animation, and deserves every kudo imaginable for realizing that the public was ready for the likes of LIQUID TELEVISION and AEON FLUX. After all, Man does not live by Bart alone.

KEY ★★★★★ Must See, ★★★ Excellent, ★★ Good, ★ Mediocre, ☆ Poor

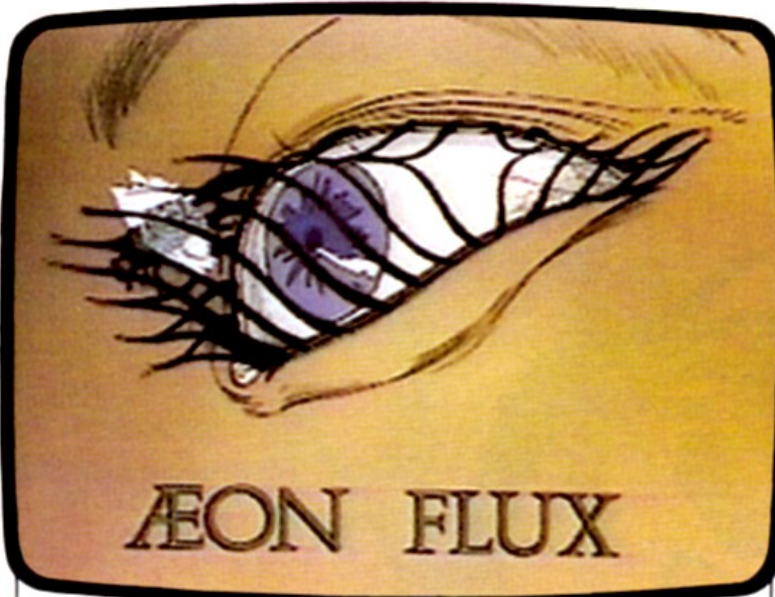
SEASON ONE (1991)

"Bhrr fhrrm, shemr vm uv mhrrr fhr."
— Articulate TV announcer, from "Aeon Flux"
(Sorry, it's the only dialogue in the episode.)

AEON FLUX ★★★★★
Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

One story, serialized into six, two-minute segments on MTV's LIQUID TELEVISION, and one hell of an introduction to the seductive, Monican spy. In keeping with the enigmatic nature

The fruits of Aeon's handiwork, dying Breen soldiers in a pool of blood in the original AEON FLUX.



Chung's logo for his first series of six two-minute shorts, a fly trapped in the eyelashes of Aeon, a Venus Fly-trap visual pun.

of the series, the plot is both simple and not: Aeon is out to assassinate Bregna chairman Mourad Ben-Jaffar, and no obstacle—not unending streams of Breen soldiers, not Bregna's convoluted architecture, not even a deadly contagion spreading its way through the Breen populace—will stop her. Faulty masonry, however, may prove a bit of a problem.

How often do you come across something that gives you the adrenaline rush of action/adventure and still manages to engage your intellect? From the first, bold cut-in of Aeon mowing down a phalanx of soldiers to the final, ethereal fade-out, Chung mixes solid animation, a surrealist's vision and an anarchist's sensibility to both exalt and deconstruct pulp dramatics. The darker elements—that raging virus—ground the story in a way that plays compellingly against its giddier elements, while Chung's lack of compunction in pushing grotesqueries to their absurd extremes—that gore-drenched room stacked floor-to-ceiling with corpses—delivers a well-justified slap to every glory-filled Rambo wannabe who ever breathed. All this with one of the goofiest demonstrations of sexual rapture on the small screen (leave that gun alone, Aeon!) and without a single word of dialogue, and what you have here is twelve minutes of intense, solidly-packed animation that serves as harbinger for all that is to come.

Said Chung, "My idea from the beginning was that you would be able to watch [the short] over and over, so that you'd continue to see things in it. Basically, my main goal was that it was a segment that would not only stand up to repeated viewings, but would actually require it."

"I actually spent a lot of time writing the script for it, and I wrote a very detailed script describing the locations and a lot of stuff that actually never made it in... A lot of people think that Aeon Flux is all just visual candy with no story. It's very frustrating when I hear that. People tend to equate text with story, I think, and when there are no words, people assume there's no story. I was really interested in almost inventing a way of telling a story without words. Some of it worked very well, some of the points I'm not sure really came across as well as I would have liked."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

Is Trevor responsible for the spread of the disease, or its cure? Both. According to the third season bible, Trevor "attained supreme power by destroying the previous corrupt regime with a virus of his own design. His timely 'discovery' and distribution of the cure secured his place as a hero among his people."

Why does the vaccine container turn into a fish as it explodes? Chung: "That particular image came out of a number of different sources of inspiration. One was a dream I had about an exploding fish; that's all I'll say about it."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Why does Trevor retrieve and consume that gunk from the wound in his finger? Is it a sign of the contagion, or just evidence of his perverse soul?

How can a word like "Foozwak" at once be so nonsensical and yet sound so dirty?

SEASON TWO (1992)

The rules are simple: Aeon Flux will die in every episode. The repercussions are far from simple: by inverting one's normal expectations for action drama, Chung rewrites the entire concept of suspense. The outcome is always assured, yet the offerings of the second season are amongst the series' most unpredictable.

Episodes originally aired without identification. The titles below are those added by Chung for the videotape release.

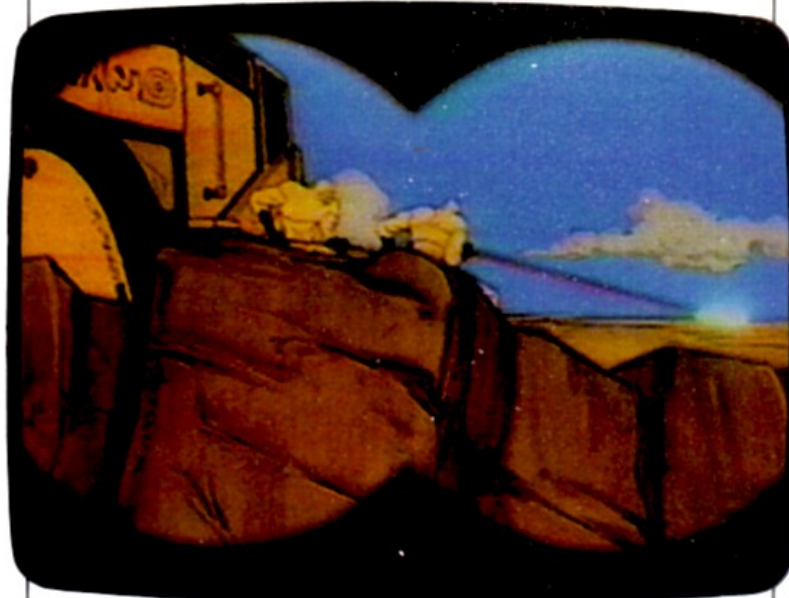
GRAVITY

★★

Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

So simple a task: assassinate a government functionary; retrieve his attaché case. Unfortunately for Aeon, this all has to be done from the exterior of a wonderfully designed airplane, and the Monican spy's footing is no better here than it was during the first season. Rest of the episode is an extended free-fall, as Aeon splits her attention between the looming ground, a railroad trestle that might be her salvation, and a pair of emergency workers who just happen to be wrestling something up over a cliff. Features strong animation (especially the rather carnal procedure by which Trevor gives Aeon her assignment) and the ultimate shaggy-dog punch-line, as Aeon's curiosity ultimately gets the better of her—rather a shock if you don't know the precept under which this season operates.

About the abrupt ending, Chung said, "I wanted to convey the idea or feeling of dying along with the character; that you're deprived along with the character of the thing you're curious about. I think the thing that's curious when a film portrays someone dying is that the character dies and the film goes on. There are different ways of doing this, but to really convey the sense of somebody's life ending, I think you have to deprive the viewer of the same thing that the character who dies is deprived of. That was the idea."



Among the eternal mysteries even Chung has no explanation for, Aeon spies emergency workers in "Gravity," wrestling something over a cliff.

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

Aeon and Trevor are supposed to be enemies. So why is she receiving an assignment from him? Because this is another episode and, essentially, an entirely different world. From the third season bible: "Each episode will stand on its own as it is an independent story without reference to the rest of the series. Characters may take on sympathetic roles according to the specific needs of each episode, yet reappear the following week as antagonists. (Trevor may be Aeon's ally this time, but her enemy the next.)"

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

What are those guys pulling up over that cliff? If Monican spies are obligated to sport a special, trap-door-equipped hollow tooth, does this have a negative impact on peanut brittle sales?



Aeon confronts Breen leader Trevor in "Ether Drift Theory" (1995), as Aeon breaks into the Habitat, a sealed Bregna colony that Trevor is using to develop "a perfectly balanced ecosystem."

ever-malleable nature. "To me, the perfect film, the thing that I strive for, is content which becomes inseparable from the means in which it's conveyed. Form and content; it's a perfect meshing of those two, to the point where you can't imagine a particular story being told in any other way than the way in which it's presented in that particular film.

"To me, the big issue of film as an art-form is whether content is merely an excuse for you to practice filmic technique, or do you use your film technique as a vehicle to convey content, ideas, whether they be political messages, moral messages, whatever. I really think that when you start to simply use form or technique as a way of putting over moral messages, or political messages, it ceases to become art; it starts to become propaganda. Not to say that film isn't a perfectly appropriate medium to do that, but I don't think that that should be confused with the activity of making art, which is far more concerned with the process of experiencing somebody else's subjective experience through some kind of objective artifact, whether it's film, or a book, or whatever."

AEON FLUX's life-span, in fact, can be measured in terms of the number of formats the series has taken over the course of its production. Debuting in 1991 as a segment of MTV's animation omnibus series, LIQUID TELEVISION, AEON FLUX's first incarnation was as a twelve-and-a-half-minute short serialized weekly into two-minute segments. Literally blazing its way onto the screen, the dialogue-free AEON FLUX picked up its storyline mid-stream, catching the agile spy as she wiped out an impossibly large number of armored security guards during a mission to assassinate Breen leader Mourad Ben-Jaffar. By the end of the segment, as Aeon fired blindly up into a pair of flanking balconies and the re-

sulting wounded tumbled from the heights like so many dominoes, one understood that Chung wasn't just exalting in sheer, visual bravura (although that first episode, and many to follow, boasted enough agile camera moves, striking compositions, and driving action to make the likes of a James Cameron weep), he was showing up the standard, Schwarzeneggerian conventions for the blatant absurdities they were.

Which was just what Chung promised MTV: "The series takes the familiar conventions of commercial Hollywood chauvinist propaganda," wrote the director in his original proposal for THE LIFE AND DEATH OF AEON FLUX, the short's original title, "pushes them to their limits and throws them back in our face in the form of absurd heroic entertainment.... Is she good? Are they evil? It won't matter because their conflict is violent, fast-paced, and fun enough to make such conventions irrelevant."

But even this bold-faced statement hid a more cunning agenda. "At first, MTV wasn't sure that something like AEON FLUX belonged in LIQUID TELEVISION," Chung remembered. "They required me to write a statement of intention, which was like a one-page defense of what I was trying to do. Mainly what I did was I played up the aspect of it being a parody of violent action movies that were very popular at the time."

What wasn't played up was the question of what one did with parody once its intent was understood. Viewers tuning in for the second installment, though, got an immediate, and startling, answer. Instead of the all-out violence-fest they had witnessed the week before, Chung presented a rather solemn interregnum that not only reduced Aeon to a figure working the periphery of the action, but also committed the ultimate, pop-cult blasphemy: allowing an action-hungry audience a sobering glimpse behind

UNTITLED

★★★

Directed by Peter Chung.

It's don't-think-about-an-elephant time: Aeon is supposed to assassinate someone (who apparently lives in the Frank Lloyd Wright quarter of Bregna), but the presence of a video surveillance system in the victim's home throws her off her game. Stricken with a fatal case of self-consciousness, she keeps trying to put a fleeting moment of video-captured clumsiness behind her, only to find her every effort making the situation worse. In no time, the Monican has totally forgotten about her mission, not to mention failed to notice *the other* assassin who happens to be in the building.

It's all in the details in this meticulously-paced comedy-of-errors: a loose wire, an open coffee cup, and a bathtub with taps more inscrutable than the control panel at Three-Mile Island are all recruited to reduce the seemingly invincible Monican to human proportions. As opposed to the full-throttle kineticism of the previous episode, Chung takes his time here and, in the exquisitely arranged compounding of small-scale calamities, manages to turn a handful of minutes into a wicked deflation of action-adventure ideals.

"That particular episode, to me, is one that's a little bit harder to follow, because it's told very elliptically," said Chung. "But I guess a few people out there got it, so I won't worry too much."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

Why was this the only episode to be left off the AEON FLUX videotape? Maybe because it's already available on the BEST OF LIQUID TELEVISION tape.

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Do all Breens purchase their bathtubs from the same military surplus outlet?



In this 1992 untitled episode, Aeon is captured by a video surveillance system, a wicked deflation of tried-and-true action-adventure ideals.

"Plop."

—Aeon's pithy summation of her intentions, from "Leisure"

LEISURE

★★★

Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

Enigmatic title for a very enigmatic, and impressively conceived, episode. Aeon's raiding a massive, ALIEN-like ship for a handful of extra-terrestrial eggs secreted deep within the bowels of the vehicle. Things are plenty weird in there: there's a throng of parasitic creatures watching her every move, and a jungle-gym-like snare to prevent her escape. But when Chung's stately, six-limbed extra-terrestrial reacts with overt horror to Aeon's crushing of an egg, the main question becomes who, in this alien environment, possesses the most humanity.

Rather a significant change in tone: the scenario and its details raise more questions than are answered (check ETERNAL MYSTERIES below), and Aeon behaves in a clearly sadistic manner, all the way to chuckling nastily as she tortures an alien embryo. "That one changed so much from the

AEON FLUX

PETER CHUNG

The making of a cutting-edge animation auteur.

By Dan Persons

Exposed to international politics while many of us were still playing with our G.I. Joes, rubbing elbows with the likes of Tim Burton and John Lasseter back before they became rulers of the nation's multiplexes, it's no wonder Peter Chung perceives the world at a slightly different skew. Having already established his influence as contributor to some of the most popular animated kid-vid of the past decade, it was only a matter of time before Chung claimed the spotlight himself. That he did it with AEON FLUX, a decidedly adult offering more concerned with intellectual stimulation than licensing opportunities, only makes the rise more gratifying.

Willing to speak at length about the creation of AEON FLUX and the themes that drive each episode, Chung is less voluble about his own childhood. He was born in Seoul, his father a diplomat working for the Korean Government. Before settling down to U.S. residency in the '70s the director-to-be logged a considerable number of frequent flyer miles, receiving hands-on educations in such diverse locales as Tunisia, London, and Kenya.

Chung entered the California Institute for the Arts in 1979, there getting his first exposure to animation techniques. In 1981, after a brief stopover at the Ralph Bakshi/Frank Frazetta collaboration FIRE AND ICE, he signed on with the Walt Disney Company. "I was at Disney for two years," the director said. "I was doing development work for live-action features that had special effects in them. None of the things that I worked on while I was at Disney was ever produced. It was before Michael Eisner. It was when Tom Wilhite was the vice-president of production. Actually, at the same time John Lasseter was developing his projects there; Tim Burton was developing projects. It didn't seem like anybody had a really realistic idea of how these projects were actually going to get made, so none of them actually did. It was around the time of BLACK CAULDRON, and they were working on TRON.



Chung's Aeon, a spy/assassin of Monica, who engages in action against Bregna, rival states of the future and a conduit for Chung's brilliant cartoon story-telling.

"It was a bad time for Disney; it was a good time for me. I was just out of school, and so it seemed a bit unreal to have a job like that. I kind of knew in the back of my mind that nothing I was doing was actually going to get produced. But it was a nice job just to have a room and just come up with ideas."

Things picked up once Chung moved over to Marvel Animation, where he boarded both the television and feature versions of THE TRANSFORMERS. In 1986, he signed on with Murakami/Wolf for TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, designing the characters and the opening titles, and art-directing the first five episodes. Said Chung, "I had no idea that that was going to become the phenomenal success that it became. I actually felt sorry for the toy company, Playmates. I thought they were wasting their time."

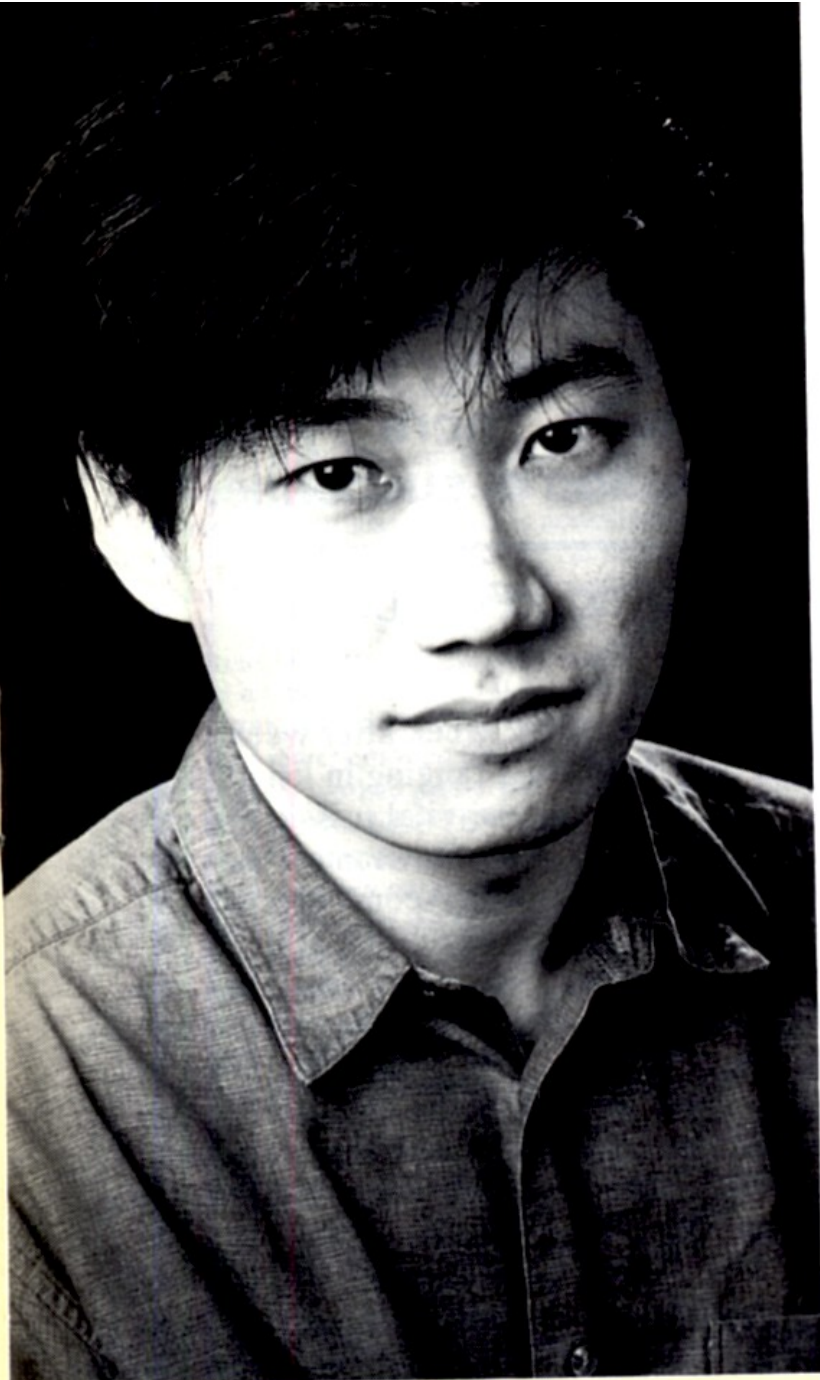
Little by little, though, more of Chung's signature style was manifesting itself in his work. A move over to Klasky-Csupo got him the director's spot for the never-aired

six-minute pilot of RUGRATS, and allowed him to create the show's opening credits, which in its infants-eye-view of playtime features such noticeable Chung touches as a kinetically roving camera and a toy robot whose eccentric gyrations are regarded with rapt ambivalence by one of the young principals.

It was Chung's work at Colossal Pictures, though, and in particular his direction of a high-profile commercial for Levi's jeans, that positioned the director for the eventual creation of AEON FLUX. The spot, for 501 Button-Fly jeans, brought Chung's graphic-novel drawing style to the world, and gave the director the opportunity to indulge his penchant for black humor. Said Chung, "They had five different animation companies doing six different spots, all in different styles. They each centered around a male character. The concept was that at the end of the commercial each of the characters was going to die, and the reason [they'd die] was that they were so preoccupied with their jeans that they ignored the life-threatening thing that ended up killing them. Basically, it's the end of the world: there's a character—a lot of people say that it's a self-portrait of myself—walking along while the whole world is coming to an end."

Next came LIQUID TELEVISION—MTV's bold stab at positioning animation for a more adult market—and three seasons of AEON FLUX, two as a featured short for LIQUID TELEVISION, one as a half-hour series. With Paramount now debating the viability of porting the character over to a feature film, Chung has been actively campaigning to make the project an animated production. Said the director, "What I would want to do is make a very mainstream film, but not go in intending to make a mainstream film. Make a very original, very personal, and yet very entertaining film which a lot of people will ultimately go to see because it'll be very entertaining, but not to go in having to put that burden [of a big-budget, live-action production] on it."

In the interim, Chung has directed several commercials, worked with Japanese producer Madhouse Studios on the character



Chung, the agile mind and virtuoso animator behind *AEON FLUX*, MTV's thought-provoking sci-fi action series.

design for what Chung described as a "science-fiction version of Alexander the Great," and has returned to the MTV fold to create a brief interstitial for the network (essentially a condensed dollop of *FLUX*-style action featuring the alien from "Leisure"). There's the potential for another season of *AEON FLUX*, as well, although nothing has been locked-down yet.

For his part, Chung claims he's in the medium for the long-run. "I think most people get into animation because they like looking at animation, or they like doing it. Usually what happens is that people get involved in the industry and they don't enjoy it anymore at that point, because they've outgrown it. But they have to come up with ways of justifying it, more adult ways of justifying it, which [is what] I've done. It's funny, because I have a lot of faith in the medium, which is far beyond what I had expected to have going into it. A lot of things that attracted me going in aren't the things that interest me now; basically, what interests me about it is that it involves so many disciplines: storytelling, writing, performance, design, drawing. Primarily, for me, it's a storytelling medium... Unlike [REN AND STIMPY's] John Kricfalusi—who doesn't believe in writing a script at all, just working the story out visually—I believe in writing it all out, in a very tightly scripted form, before there's any drawing.

"As a kid, I created my own characters and liked to make up situations. This is just an extension of that." □

“In Hollywood movies the good guys are portrayed doing immoral things and being justified because they are the title character.”

—Director Peter Chung—

the bad-guys' mask. As two fallen storm-troopers—dying both of Flux-inflicted wounds and a raging fever promulgated by a briefly glimpsed Trevor Goodchild—shed their helmets and played out their final moments in a room hip-deep in gore and corpses, the *TERMINATOR 2* generation got their image of good and evil mercilessly inverted: the faceless minions of the Dark Empire, it turned out, were possessed of their own humanity, while the goddess of adventure and excitement could also be the bringer of pain, and true death.

"The whole point of the first season," said Chung, "was to set up a character who was going around killing people, behaving amorally, but who was presented in a very heroic manner, and then to switch point of view to the victims, and get the viewer to see it from the other perspective... I see so many instances in Hollywood movies of people who are perceived to be the good guys actually being portrayed doing very immoral things, and somehow being justified because they are the title character. It's so easy to make 'us' whoever you want it to be."

The first, twelve-minute season of *AEON FLUX* was brought in for a budget of \$90,000, and animated overseas at Luk (pronounced "Luke") Film in Korea. Chung personally scripted the short, did character and background designs, and did about two-thirds of the layout work, with producer Colossal Pictures' Garrett Sheldrew picking up the remaining third. "I made a conscious attempt to make it not look like a typical kid's cartoon," said Chung. "I wanted to go for more of a style that resembled a graphic novel; I was thinking specifically of European comics.

"I was very determined not to do the wrong things that I'd seen being done in the other shows that I'd worked on. Most of my career consists of working on TV animation for other studios—not my own characters—and I was constantly struck by the way artwork was wasted, or not shown to its best advantage on the screen. You would have these beautifully drawn and painted preproduction materials, but the way they were presented on the screen usually detracted from the overall flow of what the story was trying to say.

"There's a good reason for that; it has to

original idea that I wanted," said Chung. "I was interested in the idea of death as punishment for an immoral act. In that particular one, it's not the experience of death as much as the moral structure of death being related to the viewer.

"Characters who do bad things in movies are required to be punished. Death often functions as the punishment. Filmmakers very often play up creating characters and making them so you want to see them die, creating villains who are only there to provide a kind of relief when the filmmaker kills them off. I was interested in casting Aeon in that role."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

Why is Trevor hanging out in that cabinet?

That's not Trevor, not really. From the third season bible: "Aeon possesses a kidnapped clone of Trevor (an imperfect remnant from an early experiment), and uses him as her willing sex slave."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

What purpose does Aeon believe is served when she deliberately drops an egg?

Aren't those eggs in a rather curious location?

Who exactly is infesting the ship, here?

What is Aeon's goal? Dissection?

Extermination? Breakfast? Scrambled or sunny-side up?



Aeon practices on a Jungle Gym-like snare in "Leisure" (1992), preparing to raid a massive, *ALIEN*-like ship.

TIDE

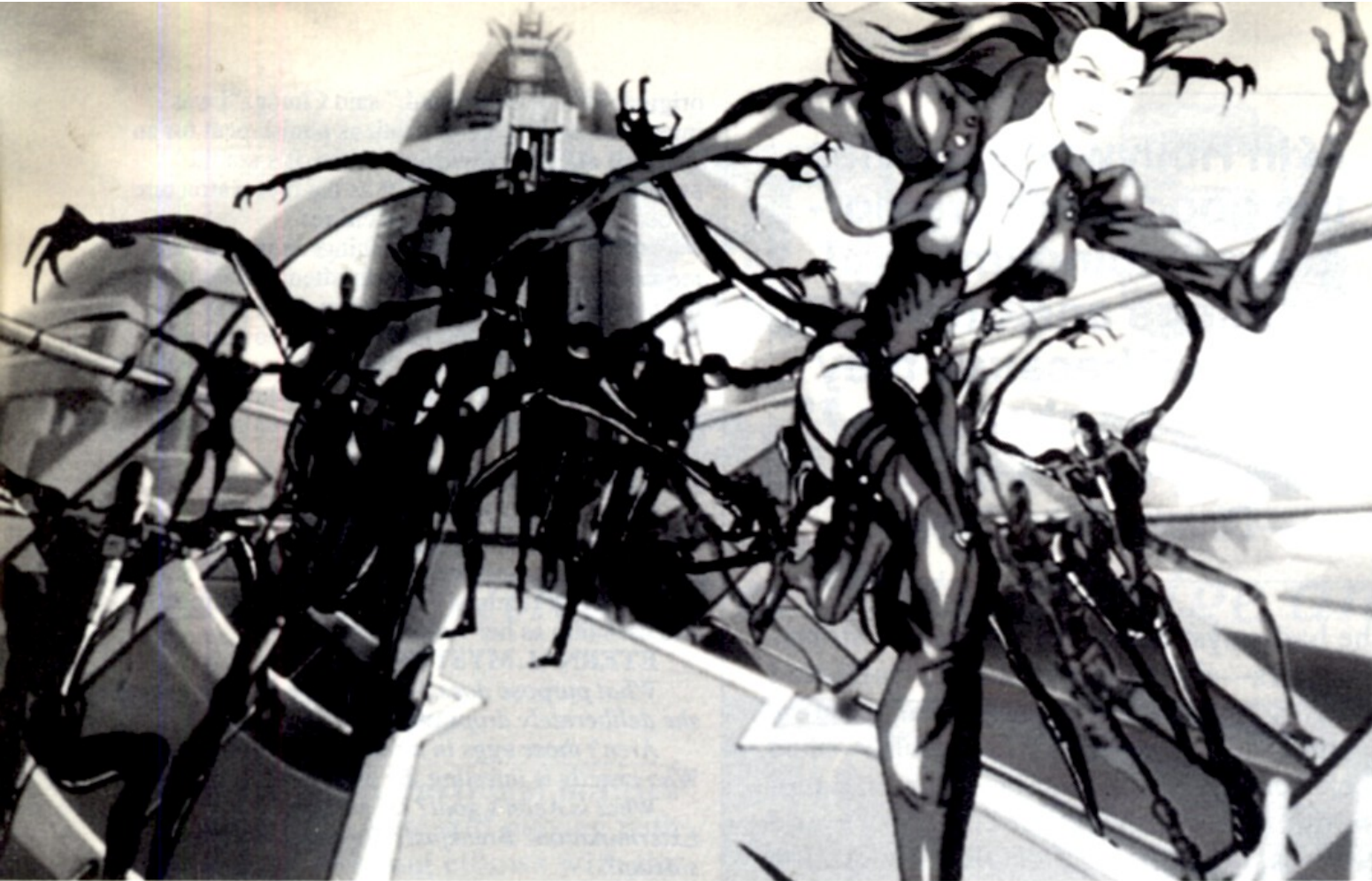
★★★★

Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

First of two second season episodes where elegant structure figures as strongly as the story itself ("War," below, is the other). Aeon has to retrieve an object from one of six locked closets in a seven-story structure. With no idea which closet is the right one, and with an elevator conveying her—as well as an unnamed accomplice and prisoner Trevor—from floor to floor, the scenario takes on the dimensions of an animated fugue. Each stop presents its own variation on the same theme: Aeon threatens Trevor, encourages her ally, then spills out into the hallway to stand-off an enemy soldier, try to open the closet door, and deflect with a precisely aimed bullet a helicopter-mounted winch that's descending towards some sort of coupling outside. The kick is seeing how Chung plays with the sequence: each floor boasts not only its own choreography, but also a visibly growing stress level between Aeon and her cohort, and a commensurate degree of carnality as Trevor and the sidekick fall deeply in lust. Best, and funniest, iteration is the last, as Aeon's body English telegraphs her growing knowledge of the exercise's cyclic nature.

Strangely enough, this is one of the most overtly sexual episodes of the series (see *QUESTIONS RESOLVED*).

According to Chung, the precision timing of "Tide" did not come by accident: "I've worked as a storyboard artist on a lot of shows, and I've always been frustrated by the need for... it may sound absurd... what is happening in the story to dictate



Chung's Diet Pepsi commercial, animated by San Francisco's Colossal Pictures, designed for the 1996 Superbowl, but aired by Pepsi on cable because it was "too weird."

do with the compartmentalization of labor in the typical animation production. There isn't one person who's really following through on creating a coherent vision; you have a lot of different people working in a lot of different departments and it all kind of gets slapped together. My overriding concern was what ended up on the screen, what the image on the screen looked like. [We] simplified the backgrounds; the backgrounds all have linework on them, so they integrated better with the characters. It goes back to the graphic novel look, as well as wanting to give myself a little bit of insurance, because I'd rather have a good drawing than a bad painting."

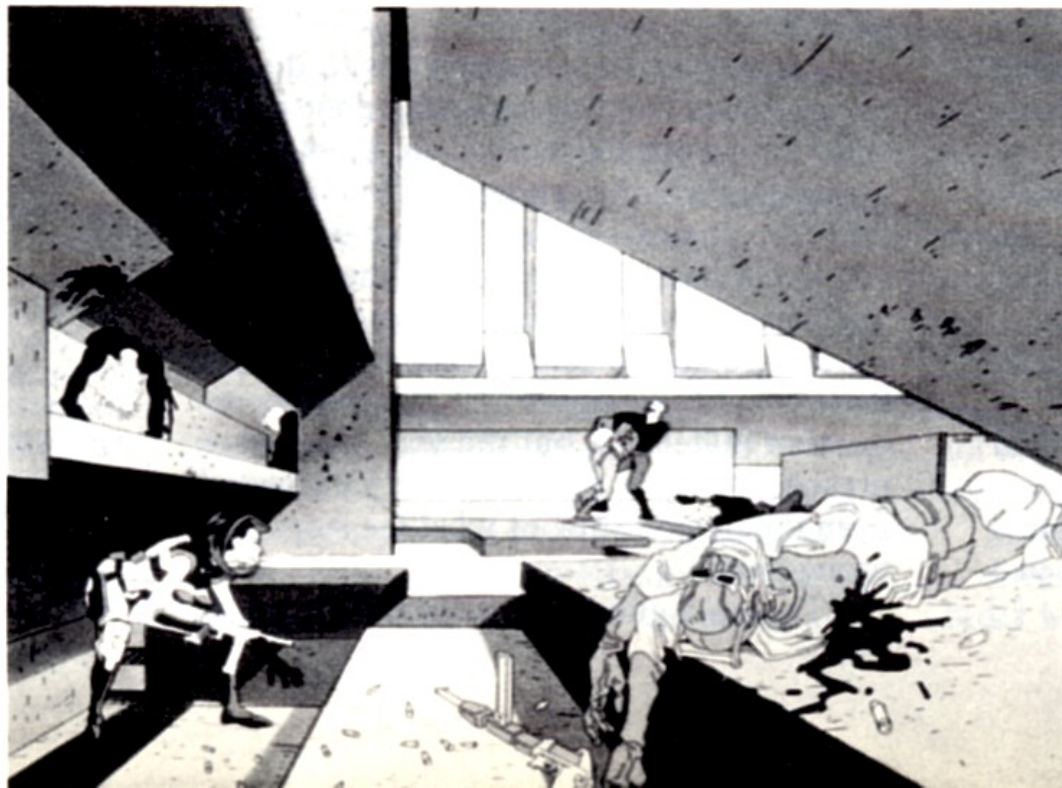
Keeping the quality up also meant taking the somewhat uncommon step of traveling to Korea to personally oversee production. "On the short films," said Chung, "I pretty much had my hand in everything, and I was able to do that because it was a shorter amount of screen-time. Directing means a lot of different things to a lot of different people, and it means different things depending on which animation studio you go to. My idea of what a director does is someone who really sees the vision of the project through from beginning to end; keeps it on-track the whole way through. To me, it's odd that that would seem unusual. It's become unusual in TV animation that a director is that intimately involved, but that's really what normal [animation] direction is. The way most cartoons on TV are directed isn't really direction so much as the directors are very much like managers of material. A live-action director is very hands-on. Not to direct that way, to me, is not to make use of the

full potential of the medium."

On an anthology show that had its share of notable pleasures (the white-trash puppet soap-opera *WINTER STEELE*) and pains (hacking up the clever, computer animated short *GRINNING, BLOODY DEATH* into such teeny pieces that even those suffering from attention-deficit disorder complained about the manic editing), *AEON FLUX* quickly became a major centerpiece. Debuting mid-half-hour, subsequent installments were shifted to pride-of-place at the end of the show. And when *LIQUID TELEVISION* went to a second season, *AEON FLUX* was one of the few segments to be carried over.

But not before Chung had worked a small modification on the concept. In the first installment of the non-serialized, second-season *AEON FLUX*, the spy executed a tricky maneuver across the exterior of an airplane, slipped, fell, and died. The next week, during an assassination attempt, she found herself distracted by her image on a video security system, was shot, and died.

In the original short, broadcast in six two-minute segments, Aeon decimates Breen soldiers as she attempts to kill Bregna chairman Mourad Ben-Jaffar.



“I’ve always been frustrated by the portrayal of death on film. There’s never anything at stake. There’s just a simulation of suspense.”

—Director Peter Chung—

And so it would go, week after week, for a total of five episodes ranging in length from three to five minutes: vital mission, tragic mistake, inevitable death. Granted, the prior season had ended with Aeon's demise, followed by a coda in which the alluring but somewhat klutzy spy was consigned to a fetish Valhalla stocked with French-tickler-tongued foot servants. Reincarnation was apparently not out of the question in this particular universe, but it seemed Chung was deliberately confusing the Karmic wheel with a Tilt-a-Whirl.

"I've always been somewhat frustrated by the portrayal of death on film," said Chung. "To me, death is a difficult thing to convey cinematically with the amount of intimacy that I think the theme needs. What I did was I submitted a proposal describing what I wanted to do in the second season by saying that I wanted to set out by presuming that Aeon was going to die in every episode, in the same way that you presume in any TV show that the character is not going to die, that the character is always going to survive the end of the episode.

"A lot of action/adventure-type shows tend to put their heroes in life-or-death situations during the course of an episode. I don't watch a lot of action/adventure-type television, but from what I remember—not only on cartoons like *BATMAN* or *X-MEN*, but shows like *HUNTER*, or *STARSKY AND HUTCH*, or any action show which ran week after week—they would always put the main characters in life-or-death situations, but you always knew that they weren't going to die. There was never anything really at stake; they were playing some kind of phony game, like, 'Is he going to die, or is he going to live?' It's sort of in bad faith, because you know they weren't going to die. It's almost like a simulacrum of suspense: real suspense involves not knowing what the actual outcome is going to be, but since you know the outcome every time, there is no real suspense, there's just a kind of simulation of suspense. There's the suspenseful music, there's the

how it's presented. I was interested in the idea of creating staging which had nothing to do with following what was happening in the story, that had an independent structure of its own. So what I did was I predetermined a structure that was based on a grid, or a pattern of rhythmical cuts, each one exactly two seconds in duration. Regardless of what was happening in the story at that time, it was always going to cut, and in a predetermined set of camera set-ups.

"So it's basically composed of twenty shots, of two seconds long, each repeated six times for the six floors. Regardless of what is actually happening in the story, you cut to that angle. So strange things happen, like you cut to a shot and nothing's happening in it, for example. But you feel it's appropriate because I've justified it in terms of almost a musical structure... It was an experiment in film form, and kind of seeing how that would effect the viewer emotionally, mentally, if you did that. I think it worked pretty well for that one."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

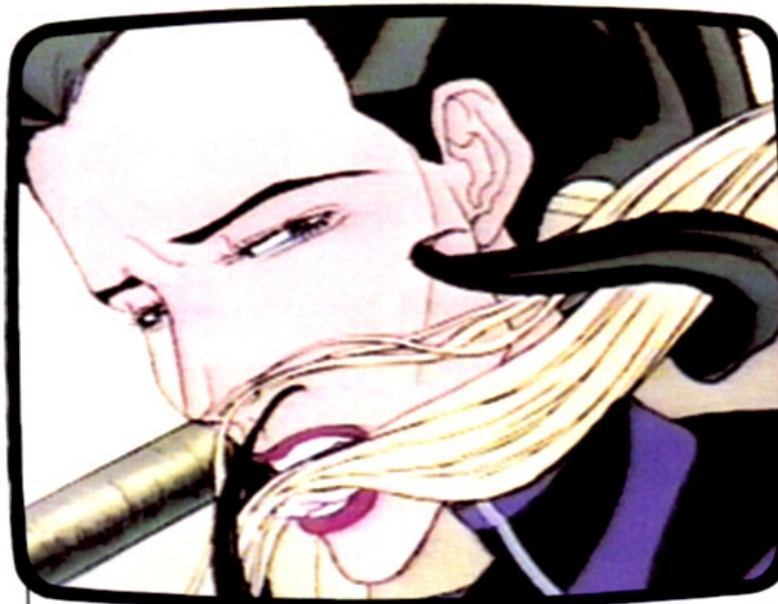
Well, of course that plug is supposed to keep the water from pouring out of the coupling. But the flesh-like coloring of the thing, the ribbing around its circumference... is it supposed to be... did you deliberately mean it to look like...? Chung: "It's obviously a sexual image."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Do all Breen elevators come equipped with bathtubs?

Is it really possible to enjoy having your nipples sucked while you're handcuffed to a horizontal bar?

Where can I buy a codpiece like Trevor's?



Strands of her accomplice's hair trail through Aeon's mouth in "Tide" (1992), an erotic interlude in Chung's fugue on a mission gone awry.

Said Chung, "I just was interested in the idea of following a character and switching sympathies midway through the story, so that the person you were following turned out to be the person you should be against, just switching back and forth to the point where you realize that any portrayal of a conflict is manipulative, or manipulated. I wanted to make very, very obvious the fact that the filmmaker was manipulating the sympathies of the viewer. It's a simple idea; sort of like looking at, say, a World War II movie made by an American versus one made by a German versus one made by a Japanese versus one made by a Russian. In each case, the person who is the ethnic representative of the filmmaker becomes the hero.

"That one, it's a fairly... not in subject but I think in intent, it was maybe a little bit more lighthearted. It was definitely taking a lighter look; it was kind of a parody of war movies. I was hoping that people would walk away from it and just not be able to look at another Hollywood movie in the same way. It pushed that approach to iconography to an absurd level."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Will it never end?

SEASON THREE (1995)

Trevor Goodchild: "The dream to awaken our world!"

Aeon Flux: "You're out of control."

TG: "I take control. Whose side are you on?"

AE: "I take no side."

TG: "You're skating the edge."

AE: "I am the edge."

TG: "What you truly want, only I can give."

AE: "You can't give it, you can't even buy it, and you just don't get it."

—Aeon and Trevor proclaim their essences, from the opening credits for AEON FLUX

An expansion to full half-hour episodes, plus the addition of dialogue, allows the explicit establishment of the conflict between Bregna and Monica, previously only implied in the dialogue-free shorts. Trevor's and Aeon's roles also stabilize: he as the ruler of Bregna, she as the independent, and mostly sympathetic, Monican anarchist. All else is up for grabs, including, as usual, whether Aeon will survive each half-hour.

**"You're hurting my hand. Normally, I like that."
—Aeon draws the line between business and pleasure, from "Utopia or Deuteronopia"**

UTOPIA OR DEUTERONOPIA

★★

Directed by Peter Chung.

It's all to the good for newly ascended Chairman Goodchild to declare an era of "New Openness" in matters civic, but he should first make sure he hasn't any damning secrets tucked away himself. Little things, things like the body

of the "kidnapped" former chairman, held in stasis and tricked up with a multi-dimensional port leading to a love-nest built especially for Trevor and a certain, comely Monican. Aeon might very well be on her way to rectify this situation, but in a society where surveillance cameras cover every corner and a person's words might not necessarily proclaim his/her true intentions, does Aeon's bold declaration that she has arrived to assassinate Chairman Goodchild bear any credence?

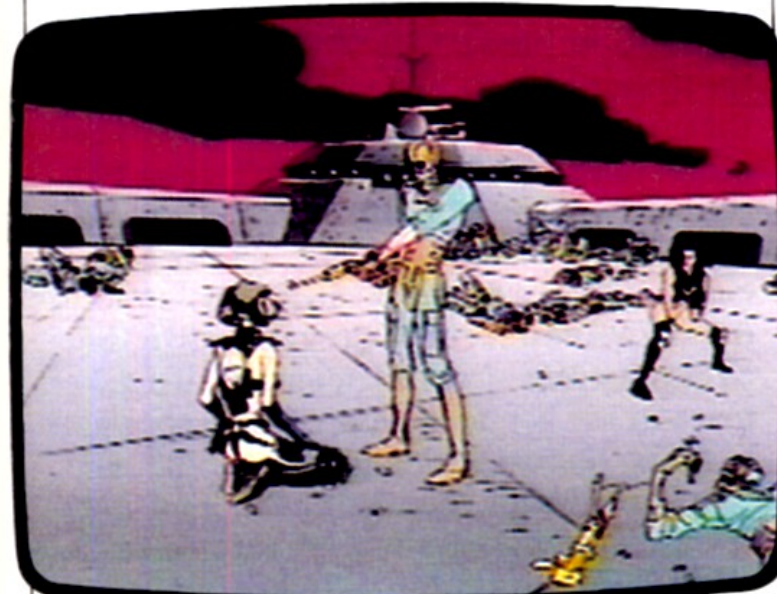
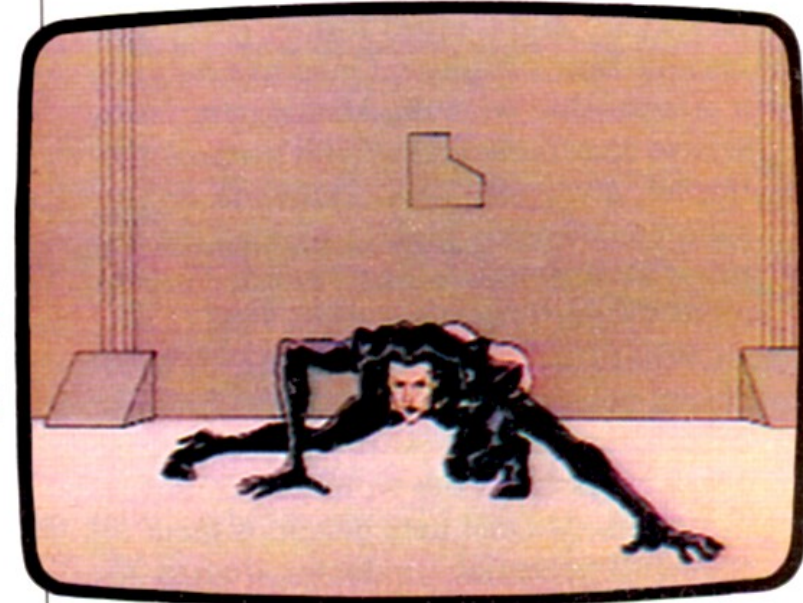
With the introduction of dialogue, we have the definitive answer to how Aeon's name is pronounced. It's "Ee-on."

The first episode not only of the new season, but of the new format as well, "Utopia or Deuteronopia" perhaps shows the strain of trying to be a bridge between the short films and the extended, thirty-minute time-slot. The limning of the New Openness—which starts out as another excuse for the government to stick its nose into every aspect of civilian life and ends hilariously with Chairman Goodchild being interviewed by a naked reporter—is superb political satire. And attempts by Aeon and disgruntled Goodchild flunky (and eternal lunkhead) Gildemere to accommodate the new social order with some very strained covert dialogue ("We must remove the patient from the tumor") demonstrates how Chung will use the slippery mutability of words in future episodes. But too much in this episode is too awkwardly incorporated: the visit to the fetish aerie feels forced and gratuitous, while the surrealism of that intimate love-nest secreted away in ex-Chairman Clavius' chest seems completely out of place. Most intriguing aspect: the physicalization of Aeon's and Trevor's dilemma through the use of phase-shift belts, electronic devices which allow wearers to vibrate into alternate dimensions and which the two would-be lovers repeatedly use to fall into and out of each other's embrace.

Chung conceded that the scenario of "Utopia or Deuteronopia" is, at best, a compromise. "[MTV] asked us to do something that was completely non-violent, and that would try to establish the relationship of the characters for the rest of the series. We really kind of tried to satisfy the MTV executives on this one, it was sort of the 'contractual obligation' episode. It wasn't one that I felt particularly happy about, but we did it nonetheless.

"Of the one's that I directed, it's my least favorite, to be quite frank. I think it could have been good. Being the first one, we were ironing out a lot of the problems. The characters aren't drawn correctly or consistently, they don't look like Trevor and Aeon to me, although we tried to fix them up a lot on retakes. And I think that there's way too much music in it. Not that the music's bad, but, being the first one, it was hard to figure out what the right balance between music and dialogue was, because we'd never had dialogue to deal with before."

Aeon crouches just before she kicks back and triggers the bomb in "Utopia of Deuteronopia" (1995), as Chung introduces dialogue.



Aeon and a Monican prisoner captured by Varsh Lockney, a Breen soldier at the start of "War" (1992), an audacious comedy of death.

WAR

★★★★

Directed by Peter Chung and Garrett Sheldrew. Available on video.

Not the real thing, mind you, but the media's exalted, hyperbolic view of it, inflated here into a brutal, audacious comedy of death—the most accomplished episode of the second season. Aeon doesn't last long in this one; she dies mid-diversion, as does an accomplice trying to ambush the Breen soldier who does them both in. From that point on, it's a narrative round-robin as the story line passes between Breen and Monican and the directors toy with the very notion of audience sympathy. Name your protagonist, he/she is here: Aryan superman, Ninja swordsman, scarlet-haired Valkyrie. All get their moment in the spotlight, all die ignoble, pointless deaths, in the process skewering everything from Wagnerian romanticism to Spielbergian homage to Eisensteinian montage. Most caustic moment: after one, agile warrior dies, Chung and Sheldrew keep up the rhythmic cutting, showing in a series of empty corridors the places where the poor bastard *would have been*. Begins and ends mid-action, just as it should, and boasts some incredible character animation (watch the swordsman hop with enthusiasm as he waits for the door to open).

AEON FLUX

THANATOPHOBIA

Its black humor and tragedy is the defining vision of the series.

By Dan Persons

Who could have seen it coming? AEON FLUX, in its third season and its new, half-hour length, had been toying with format, trying to find the proper mix of story, dialogue, and action to fit its expanded time-frame. Suddenly, with "Thanatophobia," director Peter Chung got it right. In its combination of black-humor, strange sex, and exquisite story structure, the episode became not only one of the series best, but an incomparable example of dramatic animation at its most compelling.

From the ironies packed into its enveloping prelude/coda—where child's play collides with border politics in strange, unsettling ways—to its central tale of a woman seeking escape from her own, private border war, "Thanatophobia" ups the level of narrative sophistication previously evident in the show by an order of magnitude. The story itself is almost impossible to summarize: Breen citizen Sybil has suffered a precipitous plummet in social stature as the result of her failed attempt to escape over the border into the anarchist state of Monica. Critically wounded in the endeavor, she becomes dependent upon the perverse attentions of Breen ruler Trevor Goodchild, who not only provides the drug-laced ampules that replace the missing sections of her spine, but also takes the opportunity to recruit Sybil into his own, private game of Doctor. Sybil, forced by the government to labor in a factory that Monican spies attack every night, urges former lover and current Breen fugitive Onan to establish a relationship with the Monican woman whose apartment faces Sybil's across the border, a woman Sybil knows to be the saboteur who has nightly pierced the almost seamless web of Trevor Goodchild's security system: Aeon Flux.

What follows is a complex stew of sexual politics, misinterpreted communications, and overt betrayal. Co-writer Mark Mars takes the word games of the prior episodes and here develops them to their full potential—a doctor studies X-rays of Sybil's fractured spine while de-

claring his concern over her "credibility gap;" Aeon accomplishes her surgical strikes on Breen targets by piercing the border through (where else?) "C Section." Meanwhile, both Aeon and Trevor take on new depths of character—the Monican spy functioning largely as a catalyst (albeit a very active one) whose shrewdly directed toying with the duplicitous but naive Onan (never was a character so aptly named) eventually drives Sybil to her most extreme and desperate actions; the Breen ruler exposing the slightest of sympathetic edges as he works on Sybil's vulnerabilities.

"It was an extremely arduous process, writing that script," said Chung of "Thanatophobia"'s genesis. "The original idea was something I came up with for a second season of LIQUID TV, before I knew I was going to do more AEON FLUX episodes for the second season, I had been working on something completely new and different. It involved this woman who had a spine injury and was able to twist her body around. It turned out to be way too dark and depressing a story; the main ideas involved in it were torture and police brutality. It didn't seem like it was going to get a go from MTV. It just kind of gestated for a while, and then I figured it would make a good AEON FLUX episode."

In essence, the darkness of the story remains. Though limned as black comedy, the episode is most compelling in its dramatic moments, with Sybil an especially vivid

Trevor stimulates Sybil via her spinal port in "Thanatophobia," playing a private game of "Doctor." MTV said "she can't sound like she's having pleasure."



Aeon behind the Breen border in her sleek car, en route to sabotage a target in "Thanatophobia" (1995).

portrayal of a person who comes to realize, too late, her role in a conflict she has no control over. "The things that impelled me to write that story are very personal," Chung admitted. "The background for it, the dividing wall between the two countries, was inspired by being in Korea. That atmosphere of separation between two countries, between North and South Korea, was what I was drawing on. As far as the character story of it, I wanted to do a piece that involved Aeon's domestic life, her everyday life. I really wanted it to take place in her home environment, as opposed to being out on missions all the time, and [focus on] what she did when she was at leisure at home. Basically it was a story about her relationship with her next door neighbor, and what would it be like to be Aeon Flux's next door neighbor... It was a very dense script, there was a lot of stuff in the script that got taken out. There were a lot of things that involved other victims of the wall that we encountered."

Even as we get a glimpse into aspects of Aeon's life not seen before, so do we get a new vision of Trevor and his role as conflicted Breen ruler. "In a sense," said Chung, "he's trying to have it both ways: he's trying to have the wall, but also, in his attempt to appease his own political pressures, he's resisting the idea of the wall. He allows it to exist and he allows Aeon to sabotage its existence, while he's playing this game of trying to convince people to stay—particularly Sybil—trying to prove that she's loyal to him without the need for the wall. If he were true to his principles, he would have torn down the wall, he would have relied upon the power of ideas, which is what he says at the beginning of the episode: 'It's the power of ideas. We don't need the defensive systems.'



The Chung masterpiece explores Aeon and Trevor's sexual and political war between Bregna and Monica.

MTV's Standards & Practices department asked Chung to tone down one aspect of the story. "When Trevor examines Sybil's spine injury," the director said, "originally he probed the opening with his finger, and they said, 'Well, no, that's too sexual.' Actually, in the script he inserted his finger and he inserted his tongue. [MTV felt that] using a tool was more clinical. The thing that really bothered me with that sequence was that what we had originally recorded were sounds of her moaning in pleasure as Trevor stimulated her spinal node, and they said, 'No, you can't do that. She can sound like she's in discomfort, she can sound like she's in pain, but she can't sound like she's having pleasure.'"

Despite MTV's intervention, what came out of Chung's efforts (and some very impressive animation by Mook) is a blend of dark humor and tragedy that would become the defining vision of AEON FLUX. "Really, the main theme of the piece is the failure to communicate and the tragedy that results from that," said Chung. "Because of Aeon's secretiveness, her need for privacy... she can live next door to someone, and her neighbor can spy on her, spy on her neighbor; they both know all this stuff about each other, but they never talk to each other. It's sort of like neighbors who live next to each other for years and never say 'Hello,' but they kind of voyeuristically spy into the other person's life and draw all kinds of conclusions and send all kinds of messages in roundabout ways."

"By the time Aeon does actually go and try talk to her, it's too late; she's already developed too much mistrust. Even though Aeon's intentions are to help Sybil, Sybil in the end doesn't trust her, and it results in tragedy." □

“I spent a lot of time writing the script for it. I was really interested in almost inventing a way of telling a story without words.”

—Director Peter Chung—

suspenseful cutting, but there is no life-or-death stake. I thought it would be interesting to turn that on its head and presume that the character was going to die and see what that did."

The overweening gag of season two became not *whether* Aeon was going to die, but *how*. Death came in varying guises: as retribution, as offhand summation, as ironic comment; Chung played with timing, using misdirection and the audience's media-bred assumptions to catch them off-guard. The format again changed to fit each situation: in one case, an entire episode was presented as an animated fugue, with Aeon performing variations on the same set of actions until her ultimate demise; in another case, she perished at the very top of the chapter, with a variety of characters picking up the action (and then dying their own, ignominious deaths) in a kind of narrative round-robin. In all cases, the audience was kept off-balance: Aeon's passage may have been a lead-pipe cinch, but little else was.

Including whether Chung would be able to finish the season. Originally budgeted at \$160,000 for all five episodes, the complexities involved in shooting AEON FLUX: Season Two eventually pushed the price to \$200,000; \$40,000 over budget. "I ended up spending about five months overseas," said Chung of the experience. "We delivered late. Some of the other pieces of LIQUID TELEVISION were also delivering late, so I wasn't holding up the rest of the show."

"It was actually harrowing toward the end of the second LIQUID TV series. There was no more money; I actually put up my own money, I borrowed money from my father. The studio in Korea, Luk, which was very small, was basically coming apart during the production. I was there the whole time."

Despite lapses in scheduling and budget, MTV was heartened enough by the response to the second set of episodes—which first aired in 1992—to take the next big step: converting AEON FLUX to a full-fledged, half-hour series. "One of the main reasons why they approved was that they had done focus groups where they had gotten test audiences to react to different things they were considering and AEON FLUX tested very well with female as well as male viewers, which is very rare. Most of [MTV's] programming tends to be aimed

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

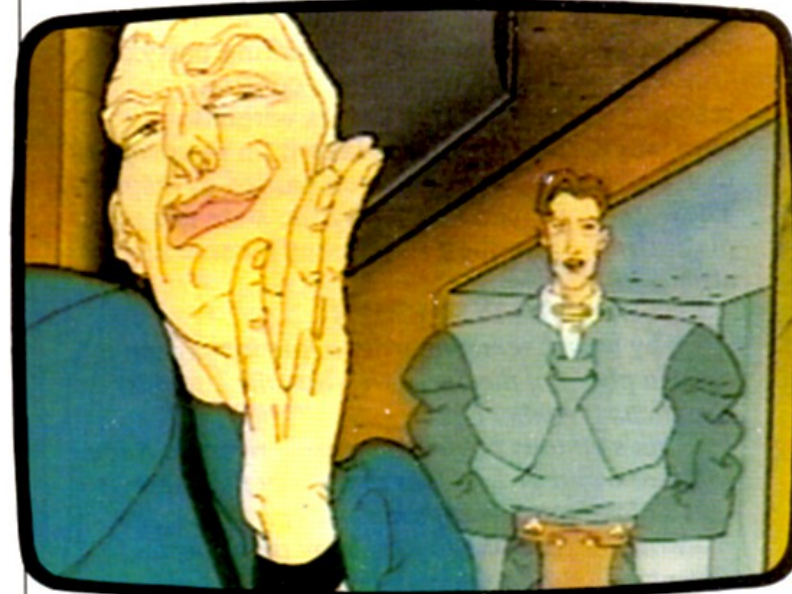
When, at the end of the episode, all the Breens hold up their own copies of the key, does that mean that they all have access to Aeon's chastity belt, Clavius' portal, or both? And why? Chung: "They all have the key to Aeon's chastity belt. Aeon made sure that the key to her chastity belt was also designed to be the tool that Trevor used to open Clavius' chest, and so she misdirects [public perception of] Trevor's guilt into something innocuous."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Are the various brackets and cantilevered hardware sported by the Breens functional devices, fashion items, or both?

Where is that barren wasteland that Trevor glimpses after chasing Aeon down the corridor?

The love-nest certainly looks luxurious, but isn't the blood-red color scheme a little ostentatious? Do you have it in a nice, sky-blue?



Bregna leader Trevor Goodchild admires himself in the mirror in "Isthmus Crypticus" (1995), escaping the banal demands of leadership in carnal delight.

"Nice wings."

"Go to Hell."

"Will you fly me there?"

—Aeon and Trevor discuss fashion options, from "Isthmus Crypticus"

ISTHMUS CRYPTICUS

★★★

Directed by Howard E. Baker. Available on video.

The Seraf-trev are bird-like humanoids of incomparable grace and beauty; so striking, in fact, that merely to behold them is to fall hopelessly in love. To what end that love is applied, though, may not necessarily be in the creatures' best interests. For Una, an earnest linguistics student recruited by Aeon to help rescue the creatures from Trevor's Isthmus Crypticus chamber, they represent the return to a romanticism the girl so desperately lacks in real life. For Ilbren, a renegade Breen with trick shoes, they hold the promise of undreamed-of carnal delights. For Trevor, they represent an escape from the banal demands of leadership (even though that escape eventually translates down to little more than the same gross urges Ilbren entertains). Only Aeon remains unsexed, but that may be less out of altruism than jealousy over the female Seraf-trev's ability to claim the heart of the man Aeon can never possess.

More straightforward than many of the third season episodes (with a script co-written by CFQ's own Todd French), "Isthmus Crypticus" becomes a sort of carnal *Maltese Falcon*, with each protagonist seeking release from his/her own internal ache in the bodies of the sad, imprisoned creatures. Howard Baker, in his debut directing stint on the show (he also supervised post-production for the season), handles this comedy-of-expectations wonderfully, especially in the utilization of Ilbren's spring-loaded shoes, the not completely

ambivalent hints of Una's and Aeon's relationship as lovers, and a strange sequence in which an unusually fey Trevor admires himself in a mirror. One of the rare episodes with a genuine, happy ending... sort of.

French came up with a cool name for the abandoned building that Aeon and Ilbren rendezvous in at the beginning of the episode: "The Last Raptor Hotel and Aviary."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

It isn't just coincidence that these creatures are called the Seraf-trev, is it? Chung: "That name was invented by Todd French, who was the writer on that episode. The idea was that these creatures were actually genetically engineered by Trevor. It's not spelled out in the script, whether they basically existed or he created them."

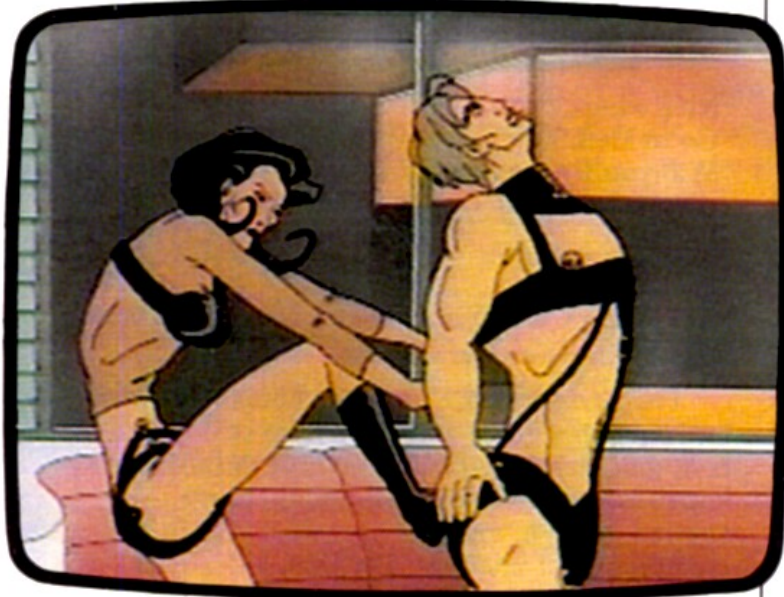
When the Monican boy tortures the homing pigeon, he's stopped by a guy who looks like he's acting in an official capacity. Isn't that rather odd for an anarchic society? From the third season bible: "There is no strong arm of the law to enforce compliance on a dissenting party... 'Enforcers' provide the edge in conflict resolution. They are free agents without company or party ties who take it on themselves to achieve agreement between parties in dispute. They are employed neither by the state nor by plaintiffs, nor do their operations receive any attention."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Why would someone train a homing pigeon to carry a photo of the Seraf-trev into the Isthmus Crypticus chamber?

Una's jealous boyfriend, Narek, refers to Aeon as "that weird girl." Does that mean that Aeon is Una's classmate? What's her major?

Wouldn't you like to join Aeon on a special adventure? How could you help? How would she reward you? (Remember, this is a family magazine.)



Aeon painfully tightens Onan's bondage straps in "Thanatophobia" (1995), an example of dramatic animation at its most compelling.

THANATOPHOBIA

★★★★

Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

It all comes together in this disturbing, intricately structured drama of a woman seeking escape from her role as pawn in the political war between Bregna and Monica, and the sexual war between Aeon and Trevor. (See sidebar, page 40.)

"These people you're copying are already superfluous. You're trafficking in excess."

"The issue is not excess, but access. Others take away reproductive rights, I grant them."

—Aeon and Trevor discuss the finer, moral points of cloning, in "A Last Time for Everything."

A LAST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

★★★

Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

Aeon goes Gothic. Trevor has perfected a



The Seraf-Trev of "Isthmus Crypticus" (1995), a bird-like human of incomparable grace and beauty.

process for cloning human beings, and Aeon deliberately positions herself to be duplicated. The plan: switch places with the doppler, seduce Trevor, then die at the double's hands to thoroughly demoralize the Breen ruler. Things go wrong almost at once: not only does Aeon find herself unequipped to handle the freedom of actually being able to love Trevor, but there's the X factor of Scafandra, a double agent with hands for feet and no idea of Aeon's intentions. Fatalistic romance, with a softer Aeon than we've seen before, and some nice touches in the animation of Scafandra's ultra-versatile appendages, and in the sight of Trevor bedding down to a harem of Aeons.

Working title for this episode: "Stray Plethora."

"That one started out being about something totally different," said Chung. "Originally what that story was about was that Trevor made copies of Aeon and used them to perform all kinds of psychological experiments, and in the end they all turn into different people. Aeon deliberately allows Trevor to do that, and her plan is for them to all converge at the end and form an army of Aeons and undermine him. But it became too unwieldy, so I reduced it to one copy of Aeon, and the theme became the idea of what would you do if another copy of you existed. It would basically permit you the luxury of doing things that you wouldn't normally allow yourself. [For Aeon], it's allowing herself to open up emotionally to Trevor."

"I wanted to do a love story. I had never done anything with that kind of emotional effect, so I thought it was a very great challenge to try to do something that was a love story, a real love story, and was really on a mythic scale."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

Why do Aeon and her clone swap places? Chung: "It shouldn't really matter because they're exact copies. As for who's the original and which one was the copy, the one that Trevor keeps prisoner is the original, and the one that goes away and comes back is the copy. But in my mind, that was never really an issue, because they're supposed to be identical."

Scafandra, the double-agent with hands for feet in "A Last Time for Everything," swinging from a pipe to complicate Aeon's mission.



ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Which side is Scafandra really working for? Does Trevor believe he can satisfy all those Aeons? Where can I learn his technique?

"We won. We must have been right."

—Victory does nothing to modulate Aeon's cynicism, from "The Demiurge."

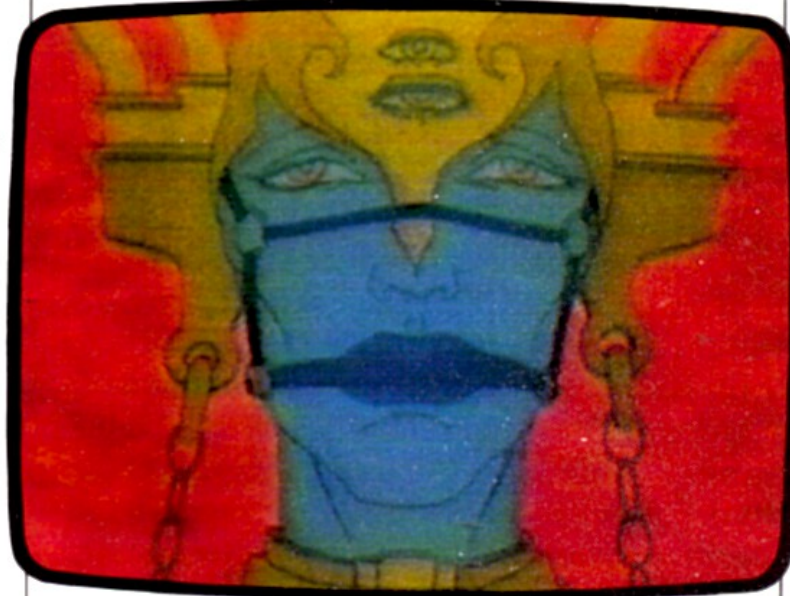
THE DEMIURGE

★

Directed by Howard E. Baker.

The war is over, and although Breen forces have failed to prevent the launch of the Monican rocket that will remove the Demiurge—a powerful, supernatural entity—from the face of the Earth, Trevor has retrieved the being's reincarnated form, contained within the body of wounded Monican Nadir, and brought it back to Bregna. Aeon must struggle both with the war's aftermath and the potential rebirth of the omnipotent being, while Trevor works to orchestrate the unleashing upon both Breen and Monican societies of a divine judgment that might just hold no tangible relation to Earthly morality. Possibly meant as a sarcastic comment on those who invoke divine influence as a motivation for war, "The Demiurge"—after a strong opening—strains too hard to incorporate far too many disparate plot strings, and ends up more confusing than complex.

"The Demiurge" (1995) bound in chains, a powerful supernatural entity about to be unleashed on the world by Trevor.



"The Demiurge" was originally meant to be the opening episode of the third season, but, according to Chung, "That one was deemed by MTV executives to be too bizarre and inaccessible, and also was deemed to be too violent."

One of the things MTV specifically requested before greenlighting the episode was a modulation of the opening sequence: "It was supposed to start with the aftermath of a huge battle," said Chung, "where the missile site was covered in dead bodies, much like the [first season's] short film. Aeon and Trevor are the last two people alive in the battle and they start to fight, but then when they realize they're the only two people left, instead of fighting they start to have sex on top of this pile of dead bodies. That, obviously, was one of the first things that got rejected."

"This one actually should have been a hour-long episode. We cut so much stuff out of it, and they added a lot of dialogue at the end. If you notice, there's a lot of un-lip-synced voice-over of people explaining things. That was done totally without my participation, it was done at MTV's demand. Basically, I like this episode a lot. It's definitely the most epic in terms of scale and subject."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

How does an anarchic society orchestrate the highly organized task of launching a rocket?

What is Trevor saying to Rubio when his voice is obscured?

Why does the Monican attack Aeon?

What do Aeon and Trevor glimpse of each other when their skins turn grey? Why are they reduced

“I got a lot of the need to portray violence out of my system the first two seasons. I didn’t want it known as the most violent show on TV.”

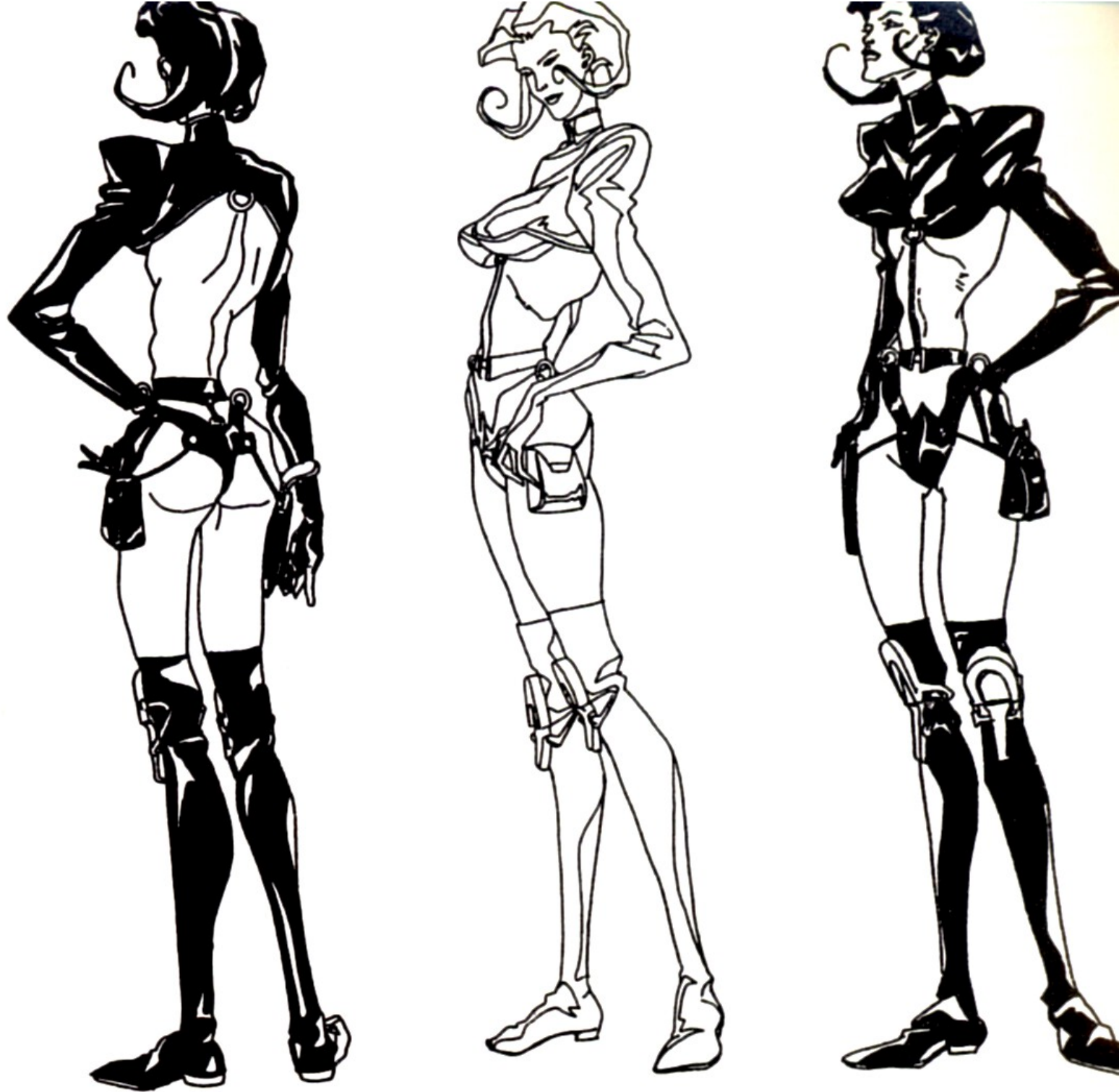
—Director Peter Chung—

towards the male audience, at least with the animation projects that they have. Demographically, [AEON FLUX] seems to appeal as much to women as to men. I don’t know if that’s really reflected in the actual ratings. That’s very gratifying to know. I was actually thinking at the beginning I was going to catch a lot of flack from female viewers for creating a character who looked the way that Aeon does. I was very happy that women actually responded very positively to the show, just because she is such a rare type in the medium: a strong, female character, not just physically, but her personality, her character.”

The transition to half-hour series also necessitated the addition of an element hitherto absent from the show: scripted dialogue. Although Aeon’s sudden acquisition of a voice (actually that of actress Denise Poirier; John Lee voices Trevor Goodchild) caught some of the more hidebound fans by surprise, Chung saw the modification as a crucial step towards defusing a common perception of the show as little more than non-stop bloodshed. “I was never interested in creating sensationalized images of violence. The first two seasons, the way the violence was treated—and I hope this came across—was in a way that was somewhat absurd. I wasn’t trying to endorse violence, I was really trying to make fun of it. They were really pieces that were more motivated by anti-violent sentiments than an attempt to glorify it. I don’t feel that there’s any kind of discontinuity in terms of my intent, even though there’s less graphic violence depicted in the new shows. The anti-violent stance is the same in the new shows as in the old.

“I think I got a lot of the need to portray violence out of my system from doing the first two seasons. I just didn’t want that to be the distinguishing aspect of the show. I didn’t want AEON FLUX to be known as the most violent show on television, or something like that.

“A lot of people who watch the new shows have tended to see the addition of dialogue as a cop-out. It really isn’t. If anything, the stories are more am-



Chung’s character model sheet for Aeon Flux, to guide Chung and other animators in drawing the series, which is animated largely in Japan.

biguous, they’re denser and require more interpretation than ever because of the addition of dialogue. Good characters, they can lie; they can use language in other ways than just explaining what they’re thinking. I think that the addition of dialogue adds immeasurable richness, if it’s well done. There are times when I wish that I hadn’t used as much dialogue as I did, but I think that the absence of dialogue would have become too distracting; you’d start to go, ‘Well, why isn’t anybody talking?’ People normally talk. I also think it would tend to limit the intellectual dimension of the charac-

ters as well. I don’t want to create characters who just seem monosyllabic, like, you know, Rambo: monosyllabic animals.”

The greater workload demanded by the half-hour format meant that Chung would not be as hands-on with the ten-episode third season as he had been with the previous seasons’ shorts. While the creator supervised production on all episodes and personally directed four himself, one episode was helmed by Robert Valley (whose previous credits include the Coca-Cola “Sun” ads), while the remaining five were directed by Howard Baker (RUGRATS; DUCKMAN). Production was split between Mook Studios in Japan for eight of the episodes, while Gana Animation in Korea (incorporating some of the personnel from the now-defunct Luk) picked up the other two. “I would have loved to have directed more of them than I did,” admitted Chung. “But, mainly because of the time constraints, it just wasn’t possible. I think Howard did a very good job on the episodes that he directed.

Trevor fires anesthetic darts at a rampaging Bambara in “The Purge” (1995), Chung’s musings on free-will and THE PRISONER, a must-see for sci-fi buffs.



to pre-verbal muttering afterwards?

"Key her up and throw away the lock!"

—Trevor inadvertently reveals his true intentions for co-conspirator Muriel, from "Reraizure."

RERAIZURE

★★

Directed by Howard E. Baker

Everyone wants the nargyle, an armadillo-like creature whose secretions cause permanent amnesia. Trevor seeks it in order to better control his political prisoners, Aeon retrieves it so she can ransom back incriminating photographs of herself and Trevor, disabled Rorty seeks it so that it may be confined and rocketed—along with the remaining members of the extinct species—into the sun. Having inadvertently killed Rorty's accomplice Muriel during an attempt to satisfy the ransom demand, Aeon agrees to help the Breen in his task, discovering in the process Muriel's collusion with Trevor, and learning finally that both memory and forgetfulness can extract mighty steep prices. Rather too complex an episode at the end, what with a small-scale recapitulation of "Tide's" variation-on-a-theme structure and a finale in which Aeon and Trevor battle it out in a speeding car while Rorty attempts to launch his rocket platform. But the drama, featuring the series' first black character of substantial depth, makes it worthwhile. Double the weird sex quotient in this outing, with Aeon caressing Rorty's stump (and check that piston!), Trevor demonstrating all the neat things that can be achieved with rubber pressure suits, and an unidentified couple showing off a fascinating trick that can be done with the gluteal muscles.

"It's about guilt, once again," said Chung. "Basically, Aeon is unwittingly involved in the death of Muriel. Aeon meets Rorty, and she starts to feel guilty about Muriel's death, and tries to hide the fact that she was involved. Again, it's also a failure to communicate... It was originally a much more mysterious and visually-oriented episode. It's a little bit talky, especially in the middle sections. But still I think it's probably one of the most accessible of the episodes."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Why does one nargyle eat the other?

Who's actually blackmailing Aeon, and why?

For an amoral anarchist, isn't Aeon overly concerned about being seen with Trevor?



Aeon holds the jar with the nargyle in "Reraizure" (1995), an armadillo-like creature with secretions that cause amnesia.

"Odd, the virus has never been fatal. In fact, there's some evidence exposure actually extends life. Why, Aeon, you may have another eighty or ninety years of this. Fresh ground pepper?"

—Trevor mixes mortality with linguini for some very odd table-talk, from "Chronophasia."

CHRONOPHASIA

★★

Directed by Howard E. Baker

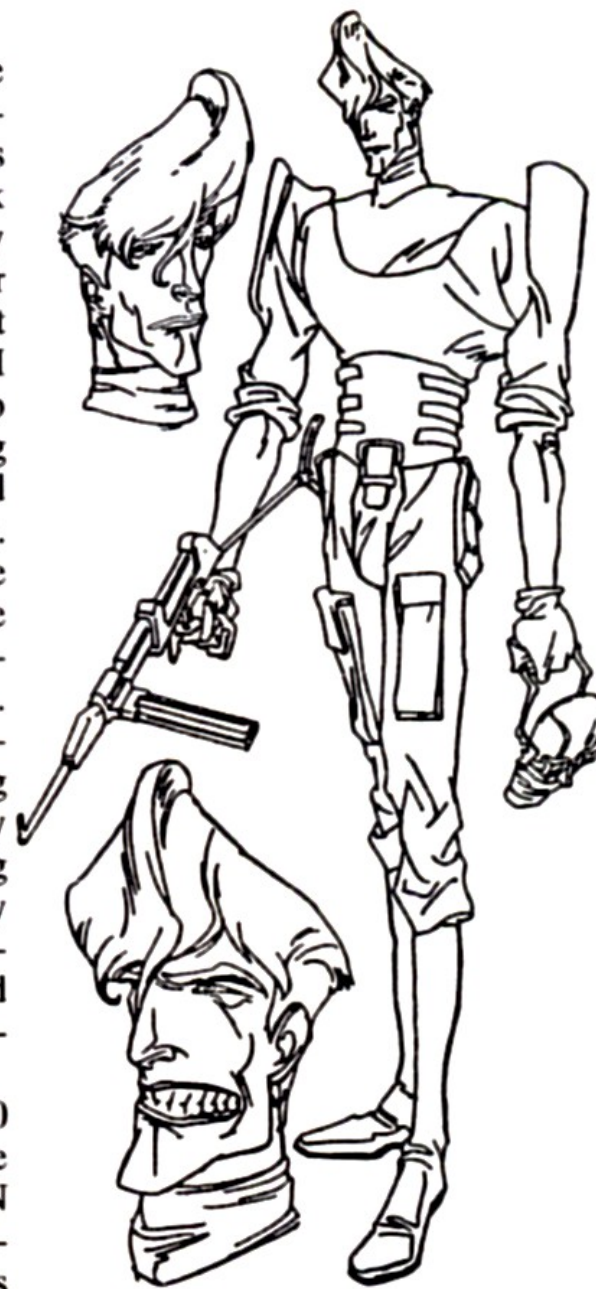
Aeon keeps awakening on a stone slab; she

"I feel that where one observes the most influence [in film-making] is in the writing. I think that's always true in any film project: the director is there to interpret what is dictated by the writer. I think that if I had to choose between writing and directing, I would probably choose writing. But then, of course, the ultimate to me would be to write and direct, directing your own writing. But if I had to choose between writing something and letting somebody else direct it, and taking something that somebody else had written and directing it, I think I would probably prefer just doing the writing."

Budgeted at \$400,000 per twenty-two minute episode—making AEON FLUX MTV's most expensive, animated series to date—the production ran into trouble with the one element that was supposed to save its producers money: the use of overseas animation studios. Said Chung, "Unfortunately, giving eight episodes to Mook wasn't entirely my decision, which I think was a little bit regrettable, ultimately. I think any Japanese studio, at the time when we sent the work overseas, would have had an impossible task. At the time, the Yen was at its highest value, in terms of the dollar-Yen exchange rate, and therefore the amount of money they were getting wasn't going very far. Because of the exchange rate, they were losing something like 20% of the money they thought they were getting, purely based on the U.S. and Japanese economies. Nothing to do with the actual money that we had."

"I feel that the quality of the work that we got from Mook was very uneven. Some of it was very good, most of it was just standard, and some of it was substandard. Suffice to say that Mook has a few very good, key people who managed to keep the quality up in the episodes in which they were involved. For the most part, the animation was just minimal level, and some of it was frankly unacceptable, but we had to take it anyway."

According to Chung, the difference between the better and worse examples of animation in AEON FLUX had little to do with whether or not the material was filmed, as is traditional for most television animation, "on twos," using twelve drawings per 24-frame second. "Usually, if it's well-animated, you can't really tell that much of a dif-



Model sheet for Varsh Lockney, Breen's answer to the Aryan superman in "War," the last episode of 1992.

ference [between twelve and twenty-four drawings per second]. If animation is well-done, you can use fewer drawings and the movement will still be fluid. It has less to do with the number of drawings you use than the quality of the animation. If the drawings are stiff, you can use 24 drawings per second, but it'll still look stiff. If you compare our first episode ["Utopia or Deuteronopia"] compared to episode ten, "End Sinister," the number of cels used towards the end was about maybe 70% of what was used at the beginning. That had a lot to do with the devaluation of the Yen. The animation on the last few episodes, except for episode 9, ["The Purge,"] which was done in Korea, is a lot more limited. Episode one has pretty full movement."

The difference between American and Japanese animation techniques added its own complexi-

ties. "For example," said Chung, "[the Japanese] use smaller paper; they use top pegs instead of bottom pegs, which makes flipping the drawings more cumbersome. They use a different camera system which uses floating peg bars. They also rely very heavily on what they call a *sakkan*, which is a drawing director, and therefore most of the animators don't draw the characters on-model—it all gets corrected by one person later on. Which is completely the opposite of what goes on in America."

"In an American studio, ideally what happens is that the different kinds of elements that get animated are animated by different people who specialize in doing those things. For example, women will be animated by someone who draws women well. And effects will be animated by effects animators. The Japanese animator is expected to do everything: draw the background, draw the character, draw the props, draw the effects, draw the shadows. And the Japanese animator is also expected to draw cleaner drawings, whereas in America they have another artist who takes the rough drawings that have been drawn by the animator and cleans them up."

"I've basically been taught to do animation American-style, and basically I was using the American layout system and camera system. It has a disadvantage when you're using camera moves, which there were a lot of in the show. When you animate something on twos—which is to say you're using

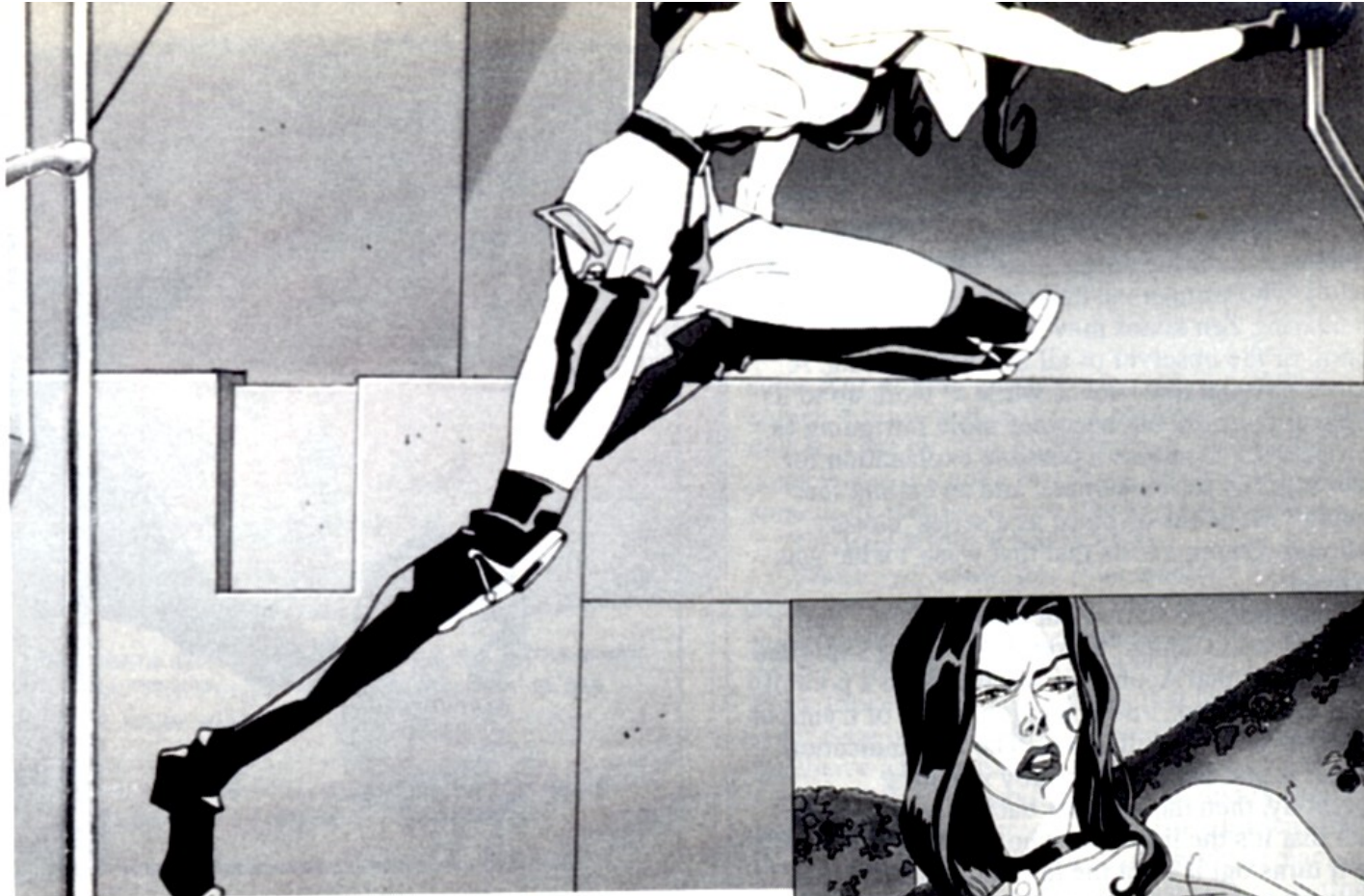
“She’s a liberal fantasy, an unbridled enforcer who’ll use any means possible including violence to advance an anti-oppressive agenda.”

—Director Peter Chung—

twelve drawings a second instead of twenty-four—and the camera is moving at twenty-four frames a second, like panning from left to right, what happens is that you get a strobing effect, which is just an optical artifact of the fact that the drawings are moving at a different rate than the camera. Attempts to avoid that were very headache-inducing—it caused problems because the characters are difficult to draw. In a show like the Simpsons, when the camera moves, they just animate the character one drawing per frame, but those characters are pretty simple to draw. With the Aeon Flux characters, you might spend over an hour to do one drawing of one character; you can easily spend more time than that. So there was that problem.”

Cases arose where Mook proved itself unequal to the challenge, such as the elaborate, puzzle-box story, “Ether Drift Theory.” “The first third of that show is excellent in terms of the visual quality,” said Chung. “The last two thirds are horrible.” Operating at top form, though, Mook produced some of the third season’s best animation, including the work for “Thanatophobia,” Chung’s disturbing farrago of strange sex, Alfred Hitchcock’s REAR WINDOW, and the border politics of the director’s native Korea. Gana, though contracted for only two episodes, came back with the season’s other high-point, “The Purge.” A black-comic examination of the nature of human conscience, the episode benefited from its scheduling as one of the last episodes to be produced, allowing Chung the freedom to turn his full attention to the elaborate scenario. Along with directing the show, Chung personally animated a large portion of its scenes, and went as far as to take over operation of the animation camera when the story’s finale proved too complex for the studio’s regular technicians.

The expansion to a full half-hour resulted, for the third time in as many seasons, in a significant modification of the series’ concept. Previously portrayed as, at best, an amoral player in a vaguely defined game, Aeon became more sympathetic, her



Aeon, the lithe Monican spy, breaks into the Breen Habitat in “Ether Drift Theory,” Trevor’s noble experiment which Aeon brings to destruction. R: The cloned Aeon of “A Last Time for Everything” (1995).



actions more identifiable as being driven by a clear, albeit personal, moral code. “She is active, not reactive,” wrote Chung in an expanded proposal/series bible developed for the third season. “She does not fight crime, nor does she protect society against enterprising aggressors. She is an agent for change, not the status quo... She is the embodiment of a paradoxical (and guilt-inducing) liberal fantasy: an unbridled enforcer who will use any means possible, including violence, to advance an anti-oppressive agenda.”

Explained Chung, “In the first series of shorts, she was on a mission which was more like she was working for an organization. She received orders to kill the leader of the Breens. In the new show, she doesn’t work for anybody. That was a very important thing to maintain in these shows, the idea that she’s a completely independent agent. She doesn’t work for anybody, she’s not loyal to a government or a political cause. She’s really out to defend her individual freedom.

“Typically, heroes are on the side of the law, or some vague idea of justice, or

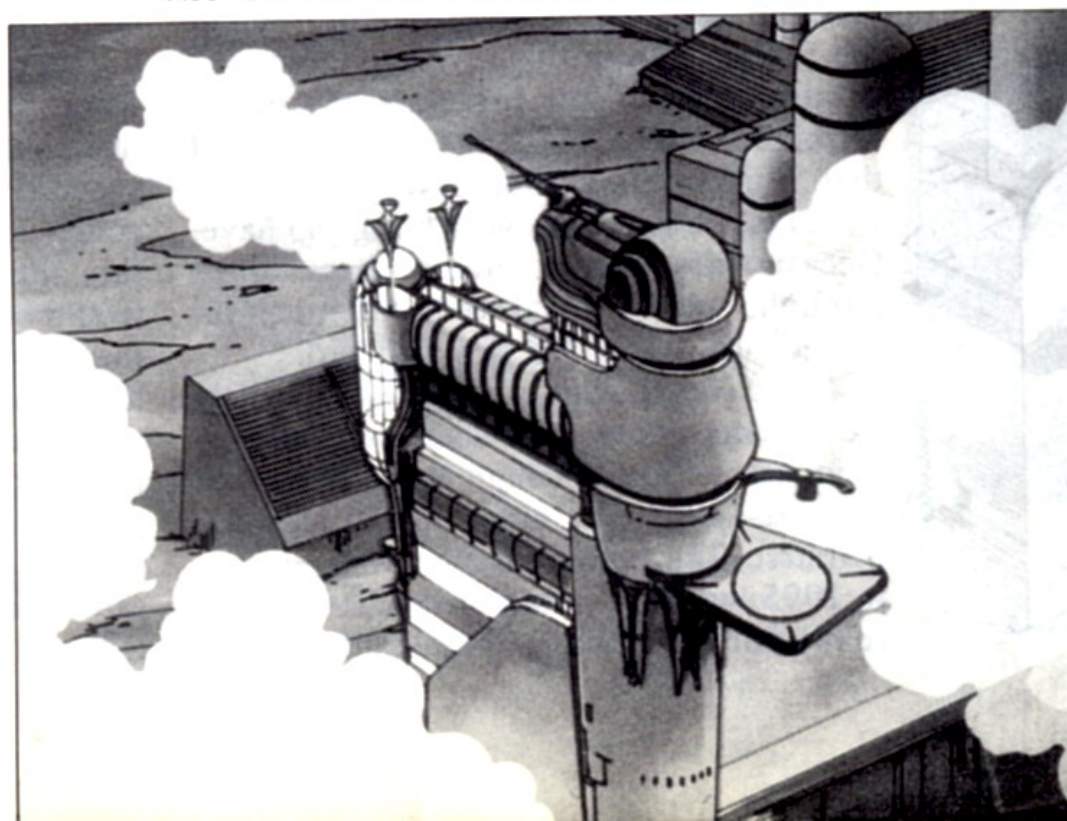
they’re fighting for their country, or something like that. I think the easy way to try and explain a character’s behavior is by pinning it on a kind of rigid ideology. To me, it was a very great challenge: to create stories in which, depending on each, individual situation, Aeon’s motivations and her actions would be explained totally within the context of that particular story. It meant having to keep coming up with motivations for her. That aspect of it, which is the main aspect of the show and the character, evolved from the beginning—the shorts—to the later episodes.”

A

s the character grew in sophistication, so did the storylines. Where in the shorts Chung’s main goal was to toy with narrative form, tossing in lashings of plot wherever they might fit, now the experimentation operated in the service of stories boasting genuine beginnings, middles, and ends. When it didn’t work—as in such episodes as “Reraizure,” a long-form attempt to re-create the film-fugue concept from the previous season—the results could

look forced and over-calculated. When everything clicked, though—as with the aforementioned “Thanatophobia”—the layering of themes, juxtaposition of incident, and revelation of synchronic ironies could be breathtaking. “I think, easily, these scripts could have been done as hour-long episodes,” Chung admits. “Ultimately my goal is to create films that are, in a sense—I don’t like to use the word perfect, but what I mean by perfect is that you can’t take away a frame, and you can’t improve on it by adding a frame. Just absolutely

Trevor’s tower, the office in the clouds for the Bregna leader who is both Aeon’s nemesis and lover in the futuristic action series.



doesn't know why. She and Trevor are seeking a grotesque, mutant baby—for what reason is not clear. Time may or may not be bending in upon itself, Aeon or Trevor or the entire world may be infected with a engineered virus that causes permanent madness or universal bliss or both, and the boy who wanders in and out of a subterranean lab uttering Zen koans may be the orchestrator, the victim, or the observer of all that's happening. A curious episode that takes a while to work up to its elliptical premise, but becomes more intriguing as it progresses. Contains a possible explanation for Aeon's ability to reincarnate; and an ending that wouldn't seem out-of-place as a series' closer (although Chung insists that that wasn't what was intended).

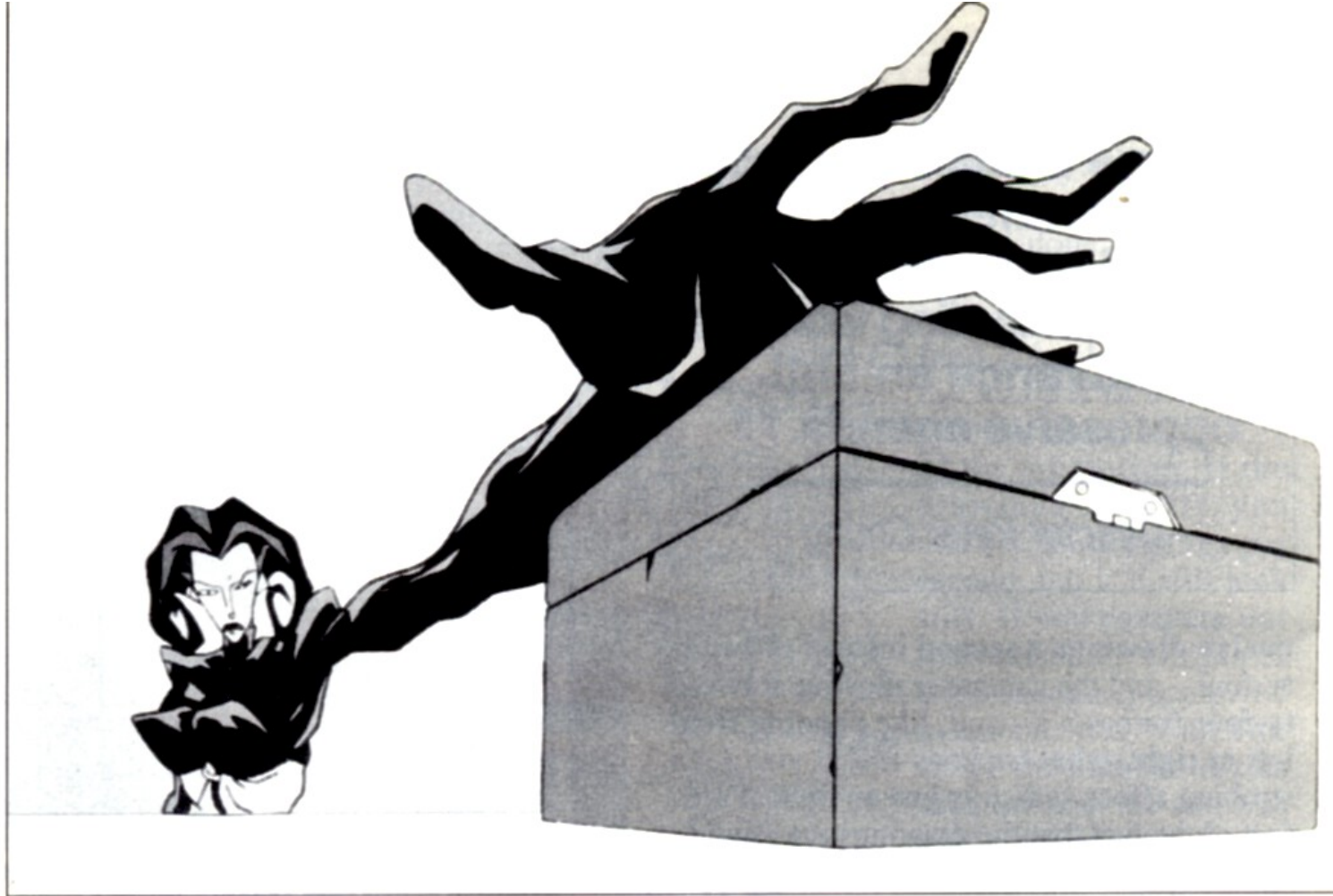
"That episode started out being a gothic horror episode," said Chung. "Garett [Sheldrew]'s original premise was that Aeon kept waking up in a pool of blood not her own, and it was [an issue] of trying to figure out who the killer was. The first indication you get is that the monster baby is killing everybody, then the monster baby dies. Then you think that it's the little boy who's killing everybody, and it turns out it's not the little boy, which leads you to suspect that it's Aeon who's killing everybody. That was the original story, which would have been more about the principal theme of Aeon confronting her own guilt and her own violence, which is an ongoing theme throughout the series."

Although trimmed back to something more suitable for the half-hour time slot, the episode still met up with resistance from MTV because of a key sequence. Said Chung, "She keeps blacking out and then she keeps waking up as if from a recurring nightmare. In the original version she woke up in a pool of blood not her own, and you were supposed to wonder who was running around the underground lab killing people. As it turns out, they didn't let us show any blood. So she wakes up repeatedly in a pool of some clear fluid... When we started storyboarding, they just said that we couldn't show her lying down in a pool of blood, even though by then we had reduced it to a little puddle of blood next to her. Even that wasn't acceptable."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

What is the ending to this episode? Chung: "I guess I always thought the ending was a little bit of a cop-out. The idea that the virus that causes universal happiness doesn't really exist and the reason Aeon's getting sicker and sicker turns out to be the common cold I think is a little bit of a cheap gimmick. But the ending sort of puts a further twist on that, like: *Well, is that really what's happening?* Because it turns out that there actually is some kind of... not anything having to do with universal happiness, but there is some kind of a strange window into another time phase, or chronophasia, where time comes from. It's one of those stories where there's a lot of red-herrings, and I think that ends up being the case at the very end, it sort of

The mutant baby of "Chronophasia" (1995), a red herring in an examination of Aeon confronting her own guilt.



Aeon reaches for the box that contains drug-laced spinal ampules in "Thanatophobia" (1995), a bribe from Trevor to Sybil in Chung's stiking combination of black humor and strange sex.

succinct and efficient. Being forced to work within a tight running time forces you to be efficient and succinct. I think that as long as people take the opportunity to go back and watch [the episodes] again, I don't necessarily think the shows have really suffered from being short, from being 22 minutes long."

What may have impacted the new, improved AEON FLUX even more was the tightening of restrictions over at MTV's Standards and Practices department. Where in previous seasons Aeon could be so transported by the sight of a copulating couple that she came close to fellating her gun, in the third season the sexuality and violence, by network mandate, was noticeably curtailed. "In the short films," said Chung, "we had really big close-ups of tongues intertwined; there was actually a shot inside a mouth with tongues. Things like that were completely taboo in the series. They didn't allow anything that focused on just parts of bodies. Basically, their standard was that to show a part of the body, especially the female body, without the head attached was exploitative. If you had a shot of Aeon's legs, but you didn't see her face, they would have a problem with that. If there was a close-up, over-the-shoulder shot of Aeon in the foreground with Trevor in the background and we saw just part of Aeon's breast but not her face, then they rejected that. You end up with a lot of head-shots, which to me is always very boring to have. Occasionally, we got some of those things through, but in general we pretty much resigned ourselves to the new standard."

In the end, though, it may well be AEON FLUX that sets the new standard. The program has garnered enough notice to prompt spin-offs: a hybrid graphic novel/illustrated narrative, *The Herodotus File*, was released in 1995, while an interactive CD-ROM is ready for '97, awaiting marketing deci-

sions. More importantly, MTV has announced the start of development work on an AEON FLUX feature, although little else about the project—such as whether the format will follow Batman's lead to become a live-action project, or will remain animation, as Chung would prefer—is known.

At the very least, one aspect of MTV's recent feature-film past might mitigate against Aeon going the flesh-and-blood route. "Nobody talks about JOE'S APARTMENT over at MTV," Chung admitted, "so it's hard to know what the effect is. I'm sort of afraid to bring it up. I'm hoping that BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA does well, because that was a case where they initially wanted to do a live-action film, and they came to their senses."

"There really hasn't been any work done on [AEON FLUX: THE MOVIE]; basically it's been, at this point, just an attempt to make a deal with a producer and a writer. Paramount [owned, as is MTV, by Big Daddy Viacom] is very determined to make this a big, mainstream Hollywood movie. My idea for doing the movie was always to do a kind of quirky, low-budget animated feature, which would basically be like the TV show, except with fewer restrictions to the content and better production values, but basically the same kind of sensibility at work. And I'm still trying to convince them that that's actually a safer thing to do, to spend less money and therefore have to recoup less. But I think that a low-budget feature aimed specifically at fans of the show would be a pretty good bet, because I think the fans of the show would go see it. We have a pretty guaranteed audience."

In the interim, another season of the series is not out of the question. "They've approached me about pitching ideas for new series," said Chung, "but I told them I'd rather pitch new Aeon episodes first. Although I would like to launch a new charac-

comes out of nowhere.”

ETERNAL MYSTERIES *Tarragon in linguini sauce?*

“She’s just another variable, a cat loose in Trevor’s mouse-maze. Aeon is trouble and nothing but.”

—Embittered scientist Bargeld thinks he has Aeon’s number, from “Ether Drift Theory.”

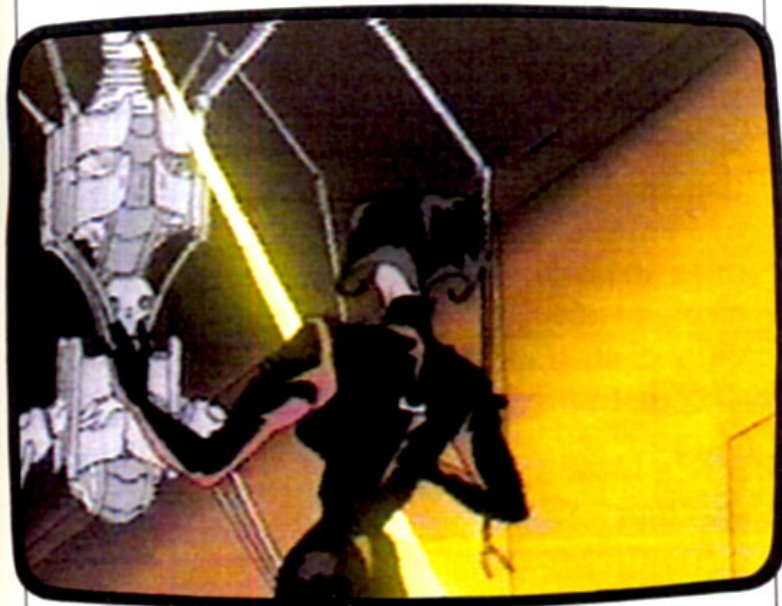
ETHER DRIFT THEORY

★★

Directed by Peter Chung and Robert Valley.

Aeon and Lindze are breaking into the Habitat, a sealed colony that Trevor is using to develop “a perfectly balanced ecosystem.” Their goal is to rescue Bargeld, the imprisoned scientist who created the stasis-inducing fluid that the colony is suspended in, and who has recently invented an electronic probe that neutralizes the fluid. With Bargeld dying of an incurable virus and leery of Aeon’s motives, plus Trevor’s unexpected arrival and Aeon’s having started a chain of events that will lead to the colony’s destruction, it’s anybody’s guess whether the imprisoning fluid can be neutralized in time to permit everyone to escape. Not one of the more immaculately structured or produced episodes—the animation of the robot security guards is some of the worst in the series, and the concept of Trevor’s utopian prison (complete with a multi-culti cafeteria that allows all the disparate species to break bread together) is so intriguing that we grieve at not being able to see more of it. Another script co-written by Todd French.

Aeon is chased by a robot in “Ether Drift Theory” (1995), breaking into Trevor’s Utopian prison.

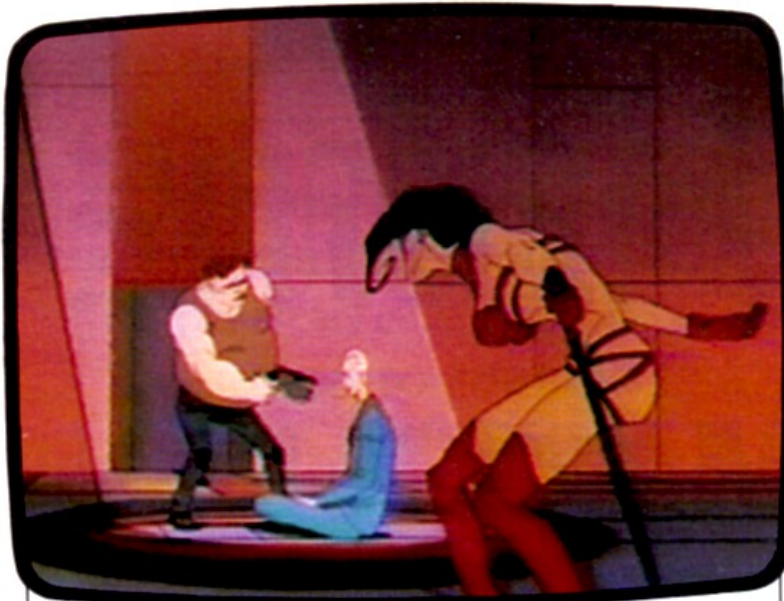


It is not by accident that the puzzle-box nature of the Habitat is mirrored in the plot-line, according to Chung. “What I was interested in doing, in effect, was creating a whole world that was basically governed by its own rules of cause and effect, so you could take nothing for granted... Beyond that, the thing that I was interested in, in terms of the character story, was the idea that Aeon was, with the best intentions, trying to help everybody get out of the Habitat alive, and all of her actions get misinterpreted in the process. In the end, her attempts to help Lindze are perceived as betrayal. It continues a theme of the problem with communication. My ongoing interest always is in the idea that the problems in the world or conflict between people exist basically in the heads of people, not in the world itself.

“That’s also true in this episode. There really is no conflict between the characters in this episode, except the conflict that is created in their own minds as the result of a misunderstanding. Aeon and Lindze are completely on the same side in this episode. But little things start to cause them to become enemies, which is really too bad.”

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

Where did all those other species come from? Did Trevor create them? Are they prisoners or guests?



Bambara attacks Trevor during his infomercial in “The Purge,” with Aeon poised at the lever with their fate in the balance.

Would a good press representative be helpful in overcoming Aeon’s negative public image?

“Hi, my name is Bambara. I’m a 36-year-old Virgo and a former killer, whose hobbies include performing recreational autopsies, defecating, and drinking rum. I’ve recently been given a conscience, and would very much like to help you.”

—A bad guy displays a new attitude, courtesy of the Custodian, from “The Purge.”

THE PURGE

★★★★

Directed by Peter Chung. Available on video.

Peter Chung goes for broke in his final episode of the season, and comes up with this agile masterpiece. Trevor’s developed a way of imposing an artificial conscience upon those who won’t control themselves: the Custodian, a willowy, puppet-like device that gets inserted via the navel and bequeaths a benign attitude on even the most violent of criminals. Aeon throws in with a group of female insurgents out to “re-purpose” Custodian-manipulated victims, and gets a maybe too-close look at a world in which everyone is programmed with the same morality. Highlights: a trip to a government feeding station (cabbages for everyone!) and Aeon starring in a perverse infomercial presided over by Trevor and two very affectionate adolescents.

No doubt about it, this is one creepy episode. From the malignant hum of the Custodian (great audio effect) to the nasty little Breen boy and his loathsome nursery rhyme, to a finale that toys with intimations of pederasty while resurrecting the vivid imagery of some of the more fevered episodes of THE PRISONER, this is a rumination on morality that builds to an all-out assault on the audience’s senses. Chung and co-writer Eric Singer wisely dispense with the entire issue of free will (for once, wouldn’t you like to see something that takes a stand against free will?), and instead raise a far more disturbing question: what forces actually govern our conscience? There’s no definitive answer here (how could there be?), but in putting Aeon through the wringer on the point, Chung & Co. succeed in taking their audience on one wild, visionary ride.

One of the most complex offerings of the season, “The Purge” benefited from being amongst the last episodes to go into production. “It’s a very difficult episode,” said Chung. “It’s a very complicated episode. There are a lot of characters in it and a lot of settings, and the story’s pretty complicated in that it needed a lot of care in the visual presentation. It was specifically an attempt by me to go back to the style of the shorts: more visual storytelling, more odd things happening, odd characters, odd events. The reason why I was able to invest myself in it was because it was my last episode. When I was working on episode one, I had episode three that I had to move on to; and then while I was working on episode three I had to finish that so I could work on episode nine. But when episode nine [“The Purge”] came along, I didn’t have another episode after that, so I just

stayed on and kept working on it.

“I’m pretty sure that 75% of people don’t understand the ending, or 90%, at least on the first viewing. I wish the ending had come out maybe a little bit clearer. But apart from that, it’s one of my favorite episodes. Basically the idea is a question of does conscience exist or doesn’t it? I happen to think that conscience does not exist. I don’t think that that’s a faculty of being human; that there’s some part of your brain that’s a center of moral choice. I think that basically you just have to decide, case by case, and this thing that we call conscience, it’s not a real thing. It’s a perception of something that we would like to think exists.”

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

Those red, white, and blue modules that the insurgents use to re-purpose the Custodian look familiar. Where have I seen them before? In your grocer’s freezer. They’re Rocket Pops, a.k.a. Bomb Pops, those frozen confections that bring you the great taste of artificially flavored cherry, lemon and blueberry ice in a handy, missile-shaped form. Chung: “I can’t in any literary way justify that. It was possibly the correct shape. The idea was that they re-purposed the Custodian’s body, replacing the head with a new head, and instead of creating some other kind of mechanical-looking head, I just decided, well, it should be a Bomb Pop.”

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

How early in the episode does the alternate Trevor appear? Was there ever a real Trevor?

Will you ever be able to look at a plate of cole slaw the same way?

“I feel your pain... Okay, okay, I don’t. I don’t understand.”

—We’re right with Trevor, from “End Sinister.”

END SINISTER

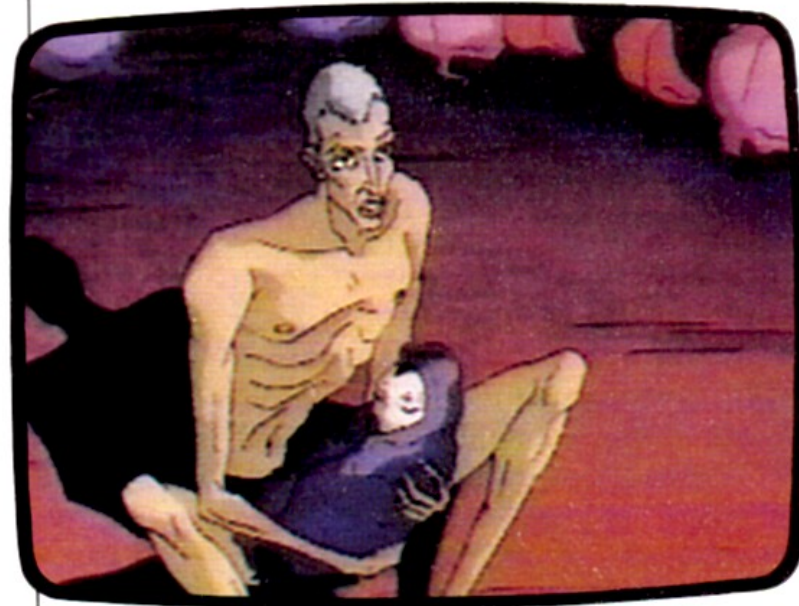
★

Directed by Howard E. Baker.

It’s the end of the world as we know it, and I feel confused. Trevor has the satellite that could wipe out half the population of Earth; Aeon has stolen the controls. The Breen wants only the strong to survive—Final Solution-style—although his definition of strength is not necessarily one you’d find in any dictionary, and in any case the arrival of a spaceship filled with dying, mouthless, genderless aliens seems to change his mind. Or is that really a spaceship, and are those really aliens? When one of the creatures takes Trevor on a little ride, is it to another planet? And what is the creature really offering Aeon when it plucks out its eyeball? Some of the answers are provided, too many are not, and unfortunately the story-line becomes so muddled that it’s anybody’s guess what really happens by the end. What should have been an interesting play on Arthur C. Clark’s contention that the further we move into the future, the more technology seems like magic, instead becomes an unsatisfying exercise in obscurity.

“I have a fundamental problem with what happens in this episode in terms of Trevor’s role in

Trevor holds an alien baby in “End Sinister,” (1995), a dying, mouthless, genderless breed that stays his plan to destroy the world.



MTV ANIME

THE MAXX

Gritty, impassioned counterpoint to AEON FLUX's cool humor.

By Dan Persons

"He tries to do good, but mostly he breaks things." Thus does The Maxx characterize himself. The purple-suited behemoth can be excused his self-deprecation: poor guy isn't sure if he's a broken-down derelict living in the depths of a festering alley, a masked avenger battling the depredations of a crime-riddled, urban jungle, or a noble primitive protecting his leopard queen from the feral brutalities of a fantasy outback. Saddled with an identity crisis of such depth, the Maxx's dim view of life—and his own place in it—is only natural.

Transitioning from city streets to Jurassic terrains, satirizing the pulpiest of comic conventions even as it probes the minds of characters so damaged that they've constructed mental escape routes for their mental escape routes, THE MAXX functions as gritty, impassioned counterpoint to AEON FLUX's cool, cynical humor. Premiering on MTV in 1995—several months before FLUX began its third season—the half-hour series took artist/creator Sam Kieth's popular comic book and translated it with enough verve to confirm the network's commitment to innovative animation with an adult edge.

Unlike AEON FLUX creator Peter Chung's background in televised animation, Sam Kieth and co-writer Bill Messner-Loebs got their start in the world of comic books. "I didn't really know what to expect," said Kieth of his reaction when first approached by MTV. "I hadn't really had any experience with TV. I think, at first, I had unrealistic expectations that there'd be lots of money, or something would happen magically, or that sooner or later everybody in the world would be noticing the cartoon. All of those drop to the side when



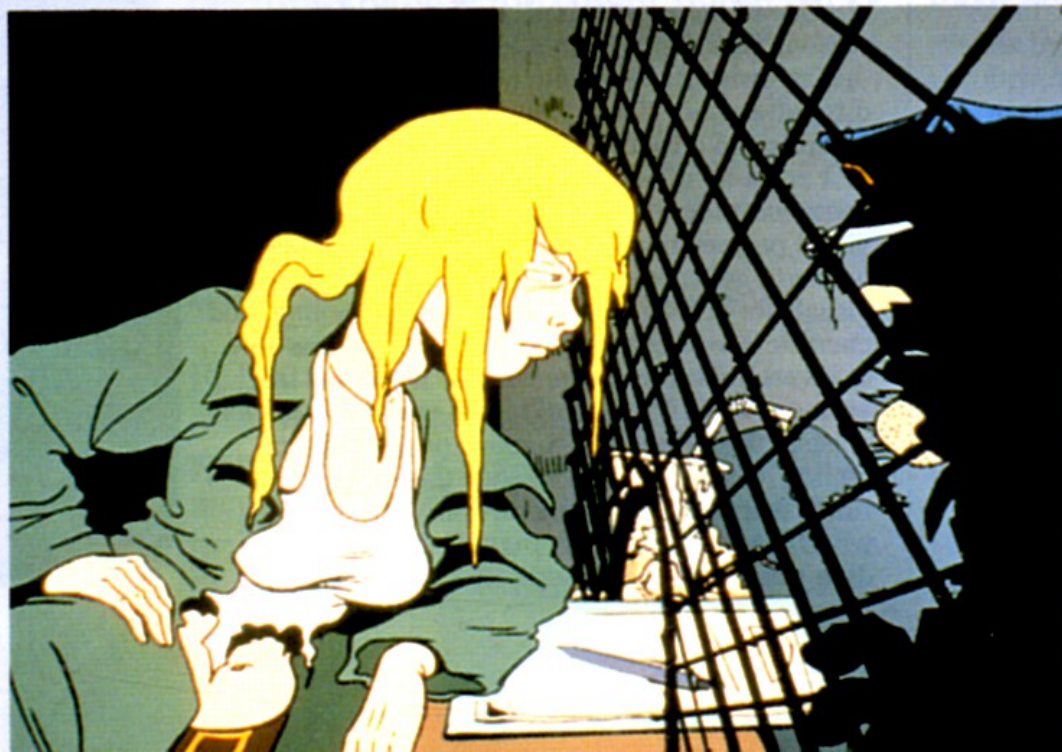
The decapitated head of sadistic killer and trans-temporal bad guy Mr. Gone.

you realize, Well, what is it really going to be? It's going to be a cartoon, and some people will see it, more people than if it was on The Shopping Channel, but it's not going to be like THE LION KING. There are budget limitations and only so much money can be spent on it, and ultimately it's how good you can make it with the resources they have. I wanted to make it the best-looking thing that I thought we could do."

Directed by Rough Draft Korea's Gregg Vanzo, THE MAXX was an eclectic mix of saturated color palettes, computer generated imagery, architectural designs inspired by Paris of the 1900's, and elaborate, expressive cel animation. (Maybe too expressive: rumors had it that the series went seriously over budget.) Splitting the screen into comic-like panels, Vanzo managed to replicate the feel of a graphic novel come to life far better than such prior efforts as HEAVY METAL. In the process, the director succeeded in coming up with a show whose very format was captivating as its plot-line.

Kieth, Loebs, and Vanzo needed that level of sophistication, given a serialized story that grew more baroque with each episode. Focusing on the relationship between the Maxx

Freelance social worker Julie Winters delivers bail money to free THE MAXX, a broken-down derelict cum masked avenger.



Julie Winters balls THE MAXX out of jail, an example of MTV's commitment to cutting-edge animation.

and embittered "freelance social worker" Julie Winters (a woman whose fashion taste tends to favor selections from the Madonna Close-Out Center), and how it gets confounded on several, dimensional plains by the machinations of Mephistophalean villain Mr. Gone, the narrative unreels in such sinuous, radical twists—incorporating in the process Native American spirit guides; sullen, suicide-prone teenagers; and existential, Dr. Seussian cartoon characters—that at one point MTV felt obligated to interrupt in order to provide newer viewers (or those just trying to keep up) with a hasty recap. The additional support may have been appreciated.

While the look of THE MAXX said, "Comic book," the sub-themes were anything but two-dimensional. Given a show that kicked off with several women falling victim to Mr. Gone and his army of mutant Isz's (blobby little eyeless creatures with ravenous appetites—imagine Smurfs stripped of every distinguishing characteristic but cute and then given a mean overbite), and from there developed into a rather elaborate consideration of how men and women address issues of power (complete with references to Camille Paglia and Susan Faludi), there was naturally some anxiety on the part of the production team as to how these themes would play with the general public. Said Kieth, "Originally there was stuff that we took from the comic, the first issue, that we showed to some women and they were put-off by it. They felt that it might be achieving the opposite end of what the comic was trying to achieve in terms of building sympathy for the female protagonist, Julie. The cartoon was showing two women attacked at



Created by animator Sam Kleth and based on his adult-edged comic book of the same name.

the very beginning, shown in a very objective way, with pretty tight, revealing clothing on. One of them was a young girl and it was kind of, *Jeez, what is this?*

"MTV was kind of concerned about it, and I was, too. Some people who are loyal to the book said, 'Don't sell out, man! You can't change the comic!' And my thing was, 'But what if we screwed up in the comic? What if, actually, we have a story that's pretty sympathetic towards women, but at the beginning, by showing Mr. Gone as the bad guy, we're desensitizing people?' If you have a book where a woman gets killed in the first few pages, you're telling people that this is the kind of a universe where that is going to happen. But it doesn't really happen in the rest of the story. I didn't want to put people off saying, 'Okay, we're going to tell one kind of story. Okay, change the rules: that's never going to happen again.' It's not fair."

While viewers have already sounded off about various aspects of the show (most vociferously about a brief lapse into live action during the first episode), and even Kleth has expressed some reservations about the smoothness with which the transition from page to screen was accomplished, all-in-all the artist claims to be quite satisfied with the outcome. "You know what it is for me? I cannot imagine anything going as well as this has gone. I know that every other time I have to summon the strength to try and make something, I'll look back and say, 'Boy, was I lucky that I went with MTV, that it went that well, that it turned out that good, that the things I had no control over went as well as they did, that Gregg cared about it as he did, that he wanted to make it as much like the book as he did.' What are the odds that a comic will come out, that it will do well, and then on top of it, that the cartoon will come out and do well?"

“I didn't want to create a show for people who watched animation or who read comic books. I wanted to reach a general audience.”

—Director Peter Chung—

ter or a new series sometime, I don't feel like I've done everything I want with the character yet.

"I think that one TV season, especially if it's just ten half-hours, is not enough to exhaust the possibilities of a character. I think a lot of shows don't really hit their stride until the second or third season. Obviously, I still feel like I have something to prove, vis-a-vis MTV, in terms of being able to make a show that is 'mainstream,' which is what I thought I was doing."

And, in Chung's view, no better medium exists to carry his complex concepts to a larger public than the one that succeeded in imbuing his beautiful, intrepid spy with everything from unearthly agility to eternal life. "That's the great strength of animation," said the director. "It's always a challenge to try to create ways of giving physical form to something that's an abstract concept. I think that filmmaking in general needs to give physical form to things in order to really exploit the power of the medium. Unless you're doing that, I think you're just filming people talking about ideas; I try to avoid that as much as possible. I don't like science fiction movies that have people talking about science-fictiony ideas without making it physical. Obviously this stuff isn't about technology, it's about symbolism and metaphor and trying to learn the boundaries between the internal and the external."

"MTV is convinced that you can produce a show—BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD is the living proof of this—that has very minimal production values, which is still going to have a good audience, that's going to draw viewers. I agree with them on that. I would rather watch BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD than shows like ANIMANIACS or Warner Bros. shows or Disney shows which have very high budgets—much higher than what we had—but don't say anything on a personal, expressive level at all. Content is everything."

"I didn't want to create a show that was for people who watched animation or people who read comic books. I was really interested in reaching a general audience. I don't know if I succeeded or not. I guess we'll see." □

it," said Chung. "In this one, Trevor is clearly portrayed as a totalitarian who is willing to kill off most of the human race, which is totally contrary to the character that we tried to establish through the rest of the series... Something I've resisted all the way through is portraying Trevor as somebody who's a megalomaniac, Hitler type. He isn't; in all the other episodes he's very benevolent—sometimes misguided, but all of his experiments are always to help people. He never deliberately sets out to commit murder on a mass scale, like he does in this one."

"Mark Mars, one of the writers on the show, came up with an idea which we proposed MTV, which was changing the word 'strong' to the word 'strange.' When Trevor says, 'The ray will only effect the weak, but not the strong like you and I,' we changed to, 'The ray will effect only the weak, but not the strange. The strange will survive.' I thought that was great; that was much more like what Trevor would do. He'd want to preserve the strange, he's not for preserving the strong. It was just a matter of changing one word in the dialogue, but MTV didn't understand that."

"Ironically, it's MTV's favorite episode. I originally wrote a premise for this which again turned out to be way too large in scope to be handled in a half-hour. My original premise involved Trevor trying to alter the course of history by planting certain key events spaced apart by hundreds of years and then going on a space trip and coming back and reaping the rewards of what he had set in motion. Aeon remains on Earth; she's in hibernation and she systematically undermines the events that Trevor had set in motion, so when Trevor comes back from his trip in outer space, everything is radically different, but not in the way that Trevor had foreseen. Certain elements of that premise survived in the finished episode."

QUESTIONS RESOLVED

At the end, why does the creature project an image of the amoebae-like organism being inserted into its body? Chung: "I thought that it should have been the other way around; the alien should have been taking the crescent shaped creature out of its body, not putting it into its body. It was supposed to be that the next generation of humans was going to be those crescent-shaped creatures. At the end of that episode, they go so far into the future that it becomes totally unrecognizable, just a big, condom shaped creature that grabs those crescent-shaped things and consumes them. That's basically what human life evolves into: a completely incomprehensible form. That telepathic message is to somehow explain the connection between the two, to show how one came out of the other."

ETERNAL MYSTERIES

How did the creature manage to wind up with Trevor's eyeball before it arrived?

If Aeon and Trevor are using the hibernaculum to travel forward in time, how can the alien use it for the trip back? What does the creature do with the two humans?

Can I have another sheet of paper? □

Trevor bonds with the aliens of "End Sinister," an image beamed to Aeon prior to their arrival.





Above: Michael Caine as Capt. Nemo, Patrick Dempsey as Pierre Arronax, and Mia Sara as Mara. Below: A diver on the Nautilus, design by Stewart Burnside.



20,000

Director Rod Hardy and

By Dan Scapperotti

The second of two versions of Jules Verne's classic *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is scheduled to be broadcast in May, on ABC. Starring Michael Caine as Captain Nemo, the production, filmed in Australia at the Warner-Roadshow Studios in Queensland, is a four-hour mini-series set in the Victorian period, with a script by newcomer Brian Nelson that offers some big changes.

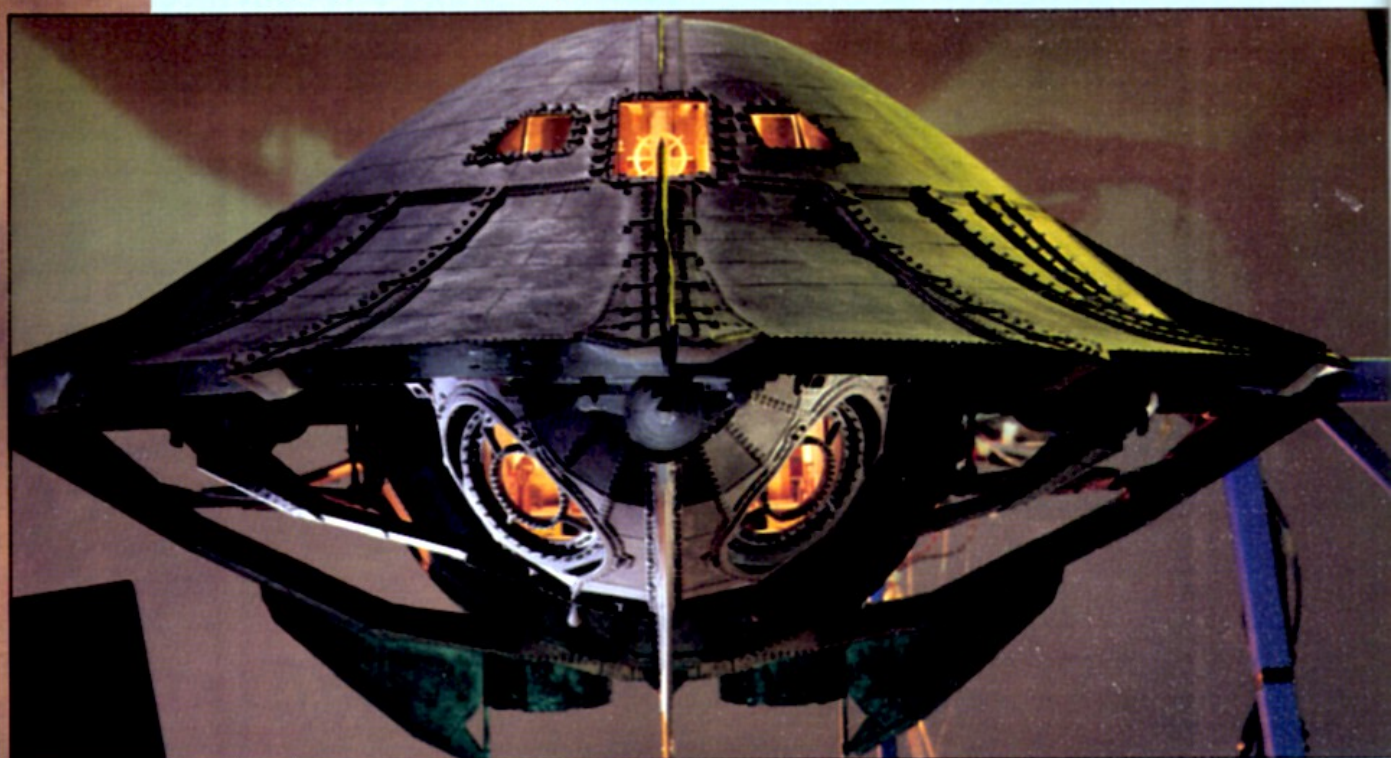
Helming this adventure is Australian director Rod Hardy who made the stylish vampire thriller *THIRST*. "The industry is always searching for new material," said Hardy, who owns a first edition of the novel. "Sometimes there is no reason why stories that have been told before couldn't be updated. I loved the Disney version, but when you set it up in the '90s it seems very cute. There was another side to Jules Verne. You know Jules Verne had a fairly dark side to him. This version is certainly a little more edgy than the '50s version." Hardy seemed undaunted by the com-

petition from the CBS version, a two-hour movie, which aired in February (see CFQ 28:9:8).

Producer Jeffrey Hayes, a television veteran who produced *THE THORN BIRDS* and *TIME TRAXX*, set to work with executive producers Keith and Richard Pierce to bring the two-part mini-series to the small screen. Impressed with the success of last year's *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*, ABC executives decided that the fantasy adventure genre was alive and well and green-lighted the two-part mini-series. The production began filming in September, 1996, on a 50-day shooting schedule.

Hardy said he cast Caine as Nemo as someone with the "stature" to follow in the footsteps of James Mason in the 1956 Disney version. In the mini-series, Nemo has an artificial hand armed with a device to destroy the *Nautilus*, something Hardy called a "'90s touch." Said Hardy, "It was an attempt to give Nemo things that were beyond the Jules Verne novel. We felt the idea of having Nemo with an almost bionic

A model of the Nautilus, mounted for effects filming. Director Rod Hardy's vision of a gritty look for the ship, "with rusty metal and clanking engine," is evident.



Leagues UNDER THE Sea

ABC bring Jules Verne's classic novel to life.

hand was a nice way to go, because it was well before its time."

Patrick Dempsey plays Pierre Arronax, a scientist through whose eyes the story is told. The part of harpooner Ned Land went to Australia's own Brian Brown. This time out, Brown plays the part with a slightly manic bent. The lovely Mia Sara plays Mara, Captain Nemo's daughter, a character not found in Verne.

Noted Hayes of the character, a scientist in her own right, "Mia is all part of the process of Nemo's scheme of planting explosives around the world which are going to rid the world, supposedly, of the earthquakes which destroyed Atlantis. Nemo sees this as the new kingdom on earth. He's building shells over Atlantis so humans can live underwater. Having been sheltered by Nemo and then having Arronax and the others come aboard the submarine she's exposed to the love of a man and sees potential faults in her father's plan. I think the way we put Mia Sara into the picture is a natural. I think for the romance aspect of the picture and for today's audience it was necessary."

The other female member of the cast is Cecile Chum, an Australian model on her first film assignment, who plays Imei, an island girl who gets injured while diving for pearls and stumbles across one of Nemo's explosives and accidentally ignites it. "She drowns and Nemo revives her," said Hayes. "He takes her aboard the submarine. In fact, she becomes the love interest of Cabe Attucks, our black character." London actor Adewale plays Attucks, the assistant Arronax.

Despite the elaborate effects sequences, Rod Hardy found



Australian director Rod Hardy, with Patrick Dempsey. ABC's four-hour mini-series—this year's second take on Verne's classic tale—airs in May.

his biggest challenge lay in working with the actors and integrating their performances into the action. "I wanted to integrate the visual effects into the story. What was difficult was working up performances in front of the process screens where the actors are reacting to nothing. We had created costumes that we could put in a tank and we had divers doing the wide shots. We needed to get closeups of the actors. Michael wasn't that keen about being in an enclosed helmet and going under the water. I don't blame him. I wouldn't want to do it myself.

"We ended up doing a lot of dry for wet shooting. Putting them in front of a green screen and creating the illusion of being underwater. There will be effects bubbles and layers upon layers of water effects and fish and things laid over their shots. Trying to convince an actor that they're down in the depths of the ocean and walking through the lost city of Atlantis or wandering through a coral jungle and suddenly being surrounded by man-eating sharks was

tough. I had to talk them through it."

The size of the new *Nautilus*, Captain Nemo's fabled underwater craft, is enormous, measuring 240' long and five stories high. Nemo's three-story living room set features an organ, spiral staircase and giant portals that open out into the sea. The craft also has elevators styled in the Victorian fashion. Motion control and CGI work on tape composited a model of the ship into the action.

"Stewart Burnside, the production designer, had very big views and big ideas," said the director. "I told him not to make this a STAR TREK under the water. I wanted to have sets that you can feel, with rusty metal and the clanking of the engine under the water. He built the most amazing sets. We built 100 feet of the submarine. Stewart arranged for the engineering part of it so we could raise and lower that set. It would go beneath the water and then come up above."

The Australian studio included a huge, permanent tank set. There they built the exterior of

the *Nautilus*' deck and Boston Harbor with the *Abraham Lincoln*. "We built about a third of the ship," said Hayes. "These Navy frigates were 300' long, so we built about 130' of the real *Abraham Lincoln* on our stage inside the tank. We enhanced the live action with miniatures and matte work. It was a very complex picture to do."

The ruins of Atlantis were created both as a set designed by Burnside, an expatriate Scot living in Australia, and a substantial miniature which covered half a large warehouse floor. A diving bell is used to ferry crew members between the sub and the airlock that leads into the ruins of the sunken continent. Nemo has built a giant dome around the center of Atlantis allowing human habitation. He plans to reconstruct the city and then he and his crew will populate the new Atlantis underwater.

The center piece of the Verne story is the attack of the giant squid, this time an octopus. Mara and Imei are trapped in a diving bell which is attacked by the octopus which slithers out of the ruins of Atlantis. "That was the biggest, most complex underwater scene we had to do in the picture," Hayes advised. "We built a big underwater tank which was 20 feet deep where we could shoot a number of our underwater scenes. That meant building an 18' animatronic tentacle and a large head which is married in with CGI against yellow screen that we shot in the tank."

The novel's action under the polar ice caps, missing in the Disney version, is one of the highlights of the ABC production. The *Nautilus* has just escaped the threat of an active volcano. Jubilation turns to hor-

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Tsui Hark

Fant-Asia Auteur Goes Hollywood

Hong Kong master directs **DOUBLE TEAM.**

By Craig Reid

For years the Tsui (pronounced Choy) Hark shark attack has slowly circled its Hollywood prey, patiently waiting for the right morsel of cinematic seafood to swim into his ocean. This spring, the feeding frenzy began as Hark unleashed his gnashing vision on a familiar Hong Kong marine delicacy, Jean Claude Van Damme. Leaning back in his chair Hark philosophically quipped, "Motion pictures are like catching fish in the water, you might get a big fish or a small one—and sometimes you don't get anything."

Although Hong Kong's fourth director to cast his fishing line into Van Damme's vocational waters (Yuen Kwei's *NO RETREAT, NO SURRENDER*, John Woo's *HARD TARGET*, Ringo Lam's *MAXIMUM RISK*) Hark is the most successful filmmaker in the history of Hong Kong cinema and is considered the father of Fant-Asia film.

When I first met the Vietnamese-born, Hong Kong raised Hark in Hong Kong in 1992, he was frantically finishing the special effects for *GREEN SNAKE* (hours before the premiere), directing *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 5*, and working on his next script. Five years later, on the Sony lot, a more relaxed Hark greeted me as he happily discussed what the film critics are all asking: why Van Damme again?

"After Ringo and John came to America to make films, I felt that I would like to try it once,



Hark on the set of *DOUBLE TEAM*, his homage to James Bond films and Patrick McGohhan's *THE PRISONER*. Tristar opened the action-thriller on April 4.

to see how it feels. It has been exciting. It's been an opportunity to do things on a different scale and angle. It's given me a different way of thinking from what I had before. I also have more time because the only thing I have to think about is directing, which is a change for me. It's funny that Ringo, John and I have each focused on making a film for Jean Claude. I don't mind people saying, 'Why make film with Van Damme, since the others have already done so?' Because it's a good way to come to America. And why not? We make our films differently and maybe that's the fun of it.

"It's not a question of a 'follow-in-the-footstep' mentality. Movies are not like that. A movie is where every film in itself is pretty much an individual character. So instead of looking at it as one following another,

it's more like that there are three versions of us doing stuff with Jean Claude; it's interesting to see how different they are."

DOUBLE TEAM, (formerly *THE COLONY*), which TriStar Pictures opened April 4, features three in-your-face, bad dude wannabes, Van Damme as ex-CIA agent Jack Quinn, who after being betrayed by "The Company" must find a way to escape the island of spies known as The Colony; Mickey Rourke as the brutal terrorist Stavros who has a personal vendetta against Quinn; and Dennis Rodman as Yaz, the gadget brandishing, weapons expert, a reluctant ally of Quinn's who helps Quinn escape The Colony, save Quinn's pregnant wife Kath (Natasha Lindinger) and "undermines" Stavros.

Apart from directing the film as a favor to his friend Van

Damme, there were several other reasons why Hark took on the movie, most notably the captivating elements from the '70s British, "I am not a number" television show *THE PRISONER*, the suspenseful *THE FUGITIVE* and the irrepressible Bond films.

"My vision for this film is that I have always been hung on espionage and spy things," said Hark. "Spy stories are very interesting creatures and fortunately, in this film, it's about spies and that's ultimately why I chose it. Plus, working with Jean-Claude, Dennis Rodman and Mickey Rourke was very exciting. People ask me, 'Weren't these three difficult to handle?' Surprisingly, I really didn't think about how to handle this, they were all very nice, cooperative and creative people."

As much fun as working in America was, Hark is openly candid on what he perceives as major differences working for a large studio. He amicably explained, "Working in a studio system it's not what 'you' want, but what 'they' want from a script. I think Hong Kong has much more freedom. The creative process is also different. In Hong Kong it's much more individual and maybe you get the producer, writer, actor and DP involved and never the executives, but here, the executives become a major element of the creative process. But what was most shocking is that I must walk through the action for the action director to approve. This is very strange to me; in my past



Hark directs Jean Claude Van Damme as terrorist Jack Quinn, who has been sentenced to exile in The Colony, a high-tech prison.

experience the action director comes up with the action designs and asks for *my* approval. To me, it's conservative, backward and not as creative. I'm not sure if this is just the American system or what."

Using crews from America, Hong Kong, Italy and France, the \$30 million production took three months to shoot and required 120 effects shots. To help Hark bring to life his chimerical special effects extravaganza he called on the services of special effects supervisor Joe Bauer, who previously worked for David Stipes on *STAR TREK: NEXT GENERATION*. "If you watch any of his 50 films you have just got to want to meet Hark," mused Bauer, a graduate of NYU. "To then work with him is a wild dream."

Hark called on Bauer to devise a way to blow up Rome's Coliseum. Other tasty visual treats that Hark served up include Andrew Orloff's interesting effect where Van Damme and Rodman drop out of a plane and become encased inside a ball that bouncingly protects them when they hit the ground. Henry Kline, Debbie Nathanson and visual effects coordinator Ziad Seirafi all contributed to creating the ocean and prison-like laser network surrounding The Colony, as well as the extensively detailed media room sequence which featured 30-foot interactive holograms. But Hark and Bauer agreed that the most challenging sequence was Van Damme's most ferocious foe to date, "The tiger."

"[In the U.S.], the executives become a major element of the creative process," said Hark. "...To me, it's conservative, backward and not as creative."

Hark interjected, "Yes, the tiger actually was my major interest in the film. It was a lion in the beginning but I changed it to a tiger because of *GHOST IN THE DARKNESS*. A tiger looks pretty and is visually striking."

To achieve Hark's high degree of interaction, Bauer and stunt coordinator Charlie Picerni used a stunt double choreographed to the tiger's computer-encoded blue screen movements. Picerni's expertise helped realize Hark's action plan for a Remme Julian assisted truck chase and a wild underwater scene that melted into a bizarre aerial sequence; Van Damme grabs onto a net, gets dragged out of the water by a C-130 cargo plane, then fights two guys while hanging outside of the plane.

"I told Hark that it would be difficult for Van Damme to do Chinese style fights," said Picerni about his collaboration with the Chinese master. "We did a combination Van Damme style with the Hong Kong style and used Jackie Chan's stunt double Sam Wong and Yin Yin Zheng [the Clubfoot character in Hark's *ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA* series] to do choreography. In one scene we

had Yin Yin kick off his boots to reveal knives on his feet as he continued to attack Jean Claude. This film has more action than any of the Bond movies. It's wild."

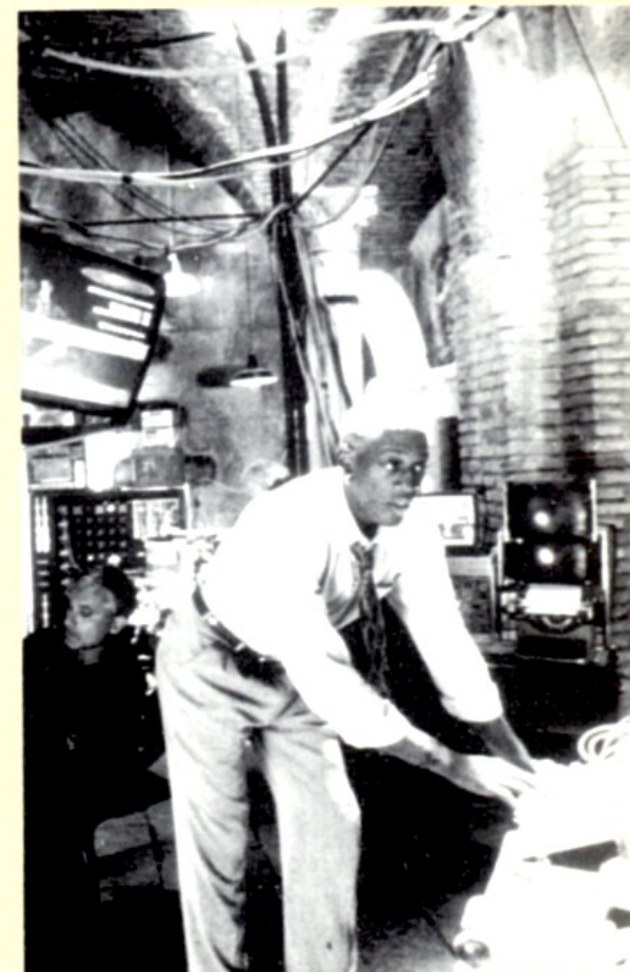
The Coliseum finale features the obligatory brain-blasting pyrotechnics. When Stavros sets off a landmine, an explosive chain reaction ensues. Van Damme, Rodman and Paul Freeman run down this tunnelled corridor being chased by an engulfing fireball. But Hark wanted more. Bauer had Bob Orlon line the tunnel walls with what appeared to be breathing CGI coke machines. "They appear to be breathing because we are testing out the CGI props that had to flex the way the plastic would really react under the explosive condition," Orlon contends.

"The fireball rips through the corridor, picks up the vending machines, and slams them behind our heroes," said Bauer. "Rodman whips a coke machine around to protect them from the fireball, which pushes them out through a wall, and then the whole Coliseum blows up. I found a fantastic practical explosion set off by Bruno Van Zeebroeck in a tunnel, not the one intended for the sequence. We just

added in 3-D coke machines, shots of some miniature coke machines shot on a blue screen dropped from a 40-foot cherry picker toward the camera and did our little compositing tricks."

Hark said he is adamant about returning to Hong Kong to make more movies regardless of China's impending take-over of the postage stamp colony, "1997 isn't a problem anymore because it has arrived," he said. "It has become a festival there. It's like you realize the tiger isn't so dangerous and that you can play with it. Maybe not a relevant metaphor but really, China belongs to us, we belong to China, we're part of it and it's our property." □

Dennis Rodman as Yaz, Van Damme's weapons specialist friend: double-teamed for high-octane Hark action.



Buffy, Vampire Slayer

By Dale Kutzera

When we last saw *BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, she had kicked major ass over that Lothos dude and was set to party at the Senior Dance—assuming they could find a new location as she had totally trashed the gymnasium. That was five long years ago. In the meantime, the moderately successful 1992 feature film, directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui, saw new life as a video rental and its writer, Joss Whedon, achieved major success writing two of the most successful films in recent years, *SPEED* and *TOY STORY*.

Buffy herself is being revived this spring as a television series on the fledgling WB network. With an initial commitment of 13 episodes, the series will expand Buffy's slaying abilities to include a host of new monsters. The bubbly cheerleader will be aided by wise-cracking buddies and a wise Watcher. The venture reunites the feature film's producing entities Mutant Enemy, Inc., and Kazui/Sandollar Productions, now in association with Twentieth Television and the Warner Bros. Network. Don't let the crowded letterhead fool you, however; this is still Whedon's baby.

"[Executive producer] Gail Berman at Sandollar came to me with the idea for the show," said Whedon. "The movie was really the one piece whereas we've broadened the show out with different monsters, different problems, different characters. Because it was very differ-

Bubbly Buffy has her own TV series, a high school horror show.



Creator and executive producer Joss Whedon on the set. The screenwriter of *SPEED* and *TOY STORY* based the Warner Bros. series on his 1992 feature script.

ent from the movie, I thought that it could sustain itself for years as a series."

Noted Berman, "When I first came to Sandollar five years ago, I read the script and thought this would make a great TV show. Then the movie came out and did okay, but was not a huge success, and the idea for a TV series went away. When the video came out and did really

well, however, I called Fran [Kazui] and we thought we would do a series for syndication, not thinking that Joss would have the time in his schedule. But we called his agent and asked Joss and he said, 'Yeah, this is what I really want to do.'"

In what Whedon calls a "high school horror show," Buffy (Sara Michelle Gellar in

the role created by Kristi Swanson) moves to a new school, having been kicked out of the last one. Sunnyvale High, however, is located on a Hell Mouth, a mystical portal to wherever it is that vampires, werewolves and other forces of darkness call home. The convenient device presents Buffy with a host of new monsters to slay, and phenomenon to combat. In one commentary on teenage cliques, the gang are cast under the spell of hyenas, and attack their victims as a pack. In another episode, the young men of the school compete for the affections of a beautiful substitute teacher that happens to be a praying mantis. Guided by the school librarian and "Watcher," Giles (Anthony Stewart Head), and aided by awkward buddy Xander (Nicholas Brendon) and shy computer-hacker Willow (Alyson Hannigan), Buffy embarks on what has been short-handled as a "mix between *BEVERLY HILLS 90210* and *THE X-FILES*."

For Whedon, the decision to return to television (he wrote the feature while a story editor on *ROSEANNE*) was also a return to the family profession. Whedon's grandfather had written for such classic sit-coms as *MAYBERRY R.F.D.* and *THE DICK VAN DYKE SHOW*. His father wrote for *ALICE*, *BENSON*, and many others. The younger Whedon's skill with funny, clever dialogue brought him acclaim for his re-write of *SPEED* and an Oscar nomination for his significant work on *TOY STORY*. He continues to contribute

revisions to his original screenplay for ALIEN IV.

With the likes of Steven Spielberg and James Cameron angling for Joss's services on their next features, why would he opt for the challenging pace and endless creative decisions of series television? Answer: challenging pace and endless creative decisions! "It's just about telling the story, and the story I wanted to tell happened to be on television," said Whedon. "It turns out that being a screenwriter in Hollywood is not all it's cracked up to be. People blow their noses on you. I can feel the difference. When I go to the set of ALIEN, people are very nice, but I'm standing in the corner watching them be very nice. When I'm making this show, I'm telling these stories. I've never had that feeling before. Not only am I telling them, but I'm telling one every eight days. I've been putting other things off, because this is the most unbelievable amount of work I ever believed existed."

Story meetings, casting sessions, production decisions—Joss is involved in them all. The stories for the initial 13 episodes were discussed and broken by Whedon and his six-member writing staff, assigned to individual writers, and returns to Whedon for polishing and rewriting. Whedon is even directing the final installment of the 13-episode order. "Joss is always on the set," said Gellar. "He's there to get it right. It's his vision and we're his followers. He's the main focus that keeps us together."

Both Whedon and Berman feel it's critical to maintain likable, identifiable characters and the series walks a narrow line between realism and fantasy, humor and campiness. "It is a very real high school," said Berman. "They go to classes. There is a library—as Joss calls it, the bat cave—where they meet and discuss all this stuff. Think of it as childhood mis-

eries or adolescent nightmares coming into reality. That is the metaphor for the series. Every kid's difficulties are expressed. The episode with the praying mantis is about boys' virginity. This mantis only goes for virgins so all these guys who have been running around the school putting their manhood out there are virgins. They are all after this beautiful teacher who turns out to be this horrible bug. It's about entering manhood and what that is really about. It's fantastic to tell those stories in a different way."

"It's not a valley girl show," added Whedon. "I think those shows look down on their characters to a certain extent—this person is a visual gag or that person is an idiot. We need to have so much more identifica-

tion with our characters. It has to be the fact that they are funny, intelligent, normal people responding to the fact that this teacher is a praying mantis. The horror has to come from real life, otherwise it doesn't really affect us. We will deal with teen subjects, because that is where all the interesting stories come from, but the teen stuff is more emotional, not issue-oriented. The horror and monster attacks have to come from the characters, from their relationships and fears."

To add depth to the series and the characters, Whedon has worked out ongoing romantic triangles for the regular cast, and created a Vampire supervillain. Known as the Master, this being lives far below the high school, in an old church

swallowed up by the earth long ago in a great earthquake. In addition to haunting Buffy's dreams, the Master sends other vampires out to pave the way for his eventual escape.

"There is a suspension of disbelief that is necessary," continued Whedon. "Our characters understand that there is a hell mouth and a vampire slayer and these things really happen, but the rest of the school just sort of takes it for granted that this is a strange place to be. It's like people living in the world with super-



L to r: Nicholas Brendon (Xander), Anthony S. Head (Giles), Sarah Michelle Gellar (Buffy), Charisma Carpenter (Cordelia) R: Gellar and Brian Thompson as Luke, turned monstrous.



man. They take it for granted."

Should Buffy prove to be a hit for the WB—a strong possibility given that the network counts even meagerly rated programs successful—it may anchor an additional evening of programming for the network in late 1997. Whedon would be perfectly happy to keep "putting off" feature assignments to explore his own brand of horror. "I think the best stuff happens when human relationships are twisted and extend into horror and not just having a monster show up. That's where the stuff is really scary, when it is somebody's parent or friend that is turning into a monster. It brings up issues that are very real.

"The thing that scares me most is people." □

NECRO

Director Lynne Stopkewich's **KISSED**

By Steve Biodrowski

"It was very difficult for me to tell my parents what my film was about!" said Lynne Stopkewich, the director and co-writer of **KISSED**. "In fact, it took me three years to make the film, and I only told them about it two or three weeks before the premiere at the Toronto Film Festival, because I was terrified that they were going to think they would have to exorcise me, sprinkle some holy water on my head or something like that."

Necrophilia is hardly an obvious, commercial choice for a movie, so it would be tempting to assume that only someone obsessed with the subject would even consider it. This turns out not to be the case, however; Stopkewich, a film school graduate with a BFA and an MFA, had been trying unsuccessfully to put together a feature for several years through federal funding agencies. Opting instead for private financing, she actually stumbled upon the short story on which **KISSED** was eventually based while she was researching a previous screenplay that she abandoned in favor of this new idea.

"I went to my producers," she recounted, "and said, 'I know you'll think this is crazy, but I found this short story about a woman who's into dead guys, and I really want to do it!' They said, 'If this is something you really feel strongly about, maybe you should pursue it.' So I tracked down the author and got the option. At that point not many people had approached her in terms of adapting that particular story, but subsequently, a bunch of people started calling about it, so I guess there was some kind of collective unconscious at work regarding the whole death and sexuality connection. I brought on a co-writer to work with me. From the point where I got the option, we shot nine weeks later."

What made her decide to change horse in mid-stream? "When you make your first feature and you make it on a shoestring

"I don't think [Molly] had even done an on-screen kiss," said Stopkewich. "And here we were asking her to take all her clothes off and climb up on a [dead] guy."



Molly Parker as Sandra, a woman that enjoys post-mortem sexual relations. Despite the subject matter, Parker had plenty of competition for the role.

budget, you can only use yourself as a barometer of whether it's something you should be spending three years of your life on," she explained. "Ultimately, I know a lot of people make films that never get seen; I'd had that experience with short films in film school, and I thought, 'If I heard about a woman making a film about a female character who's a necrophile, I'd see it.' That's my own curiosity. So I thought, 'Why not? Just go for it!'"

Not being an expert on the subject, Stopkewich did some research on funeral homes, which turned out to be easier said than done. "The biggest surprise to me was how difficult it is to get any information about it," she said. "There's like one book here on embalming in the public library, and there's a six month waiting list for that one. I thought, 'Wow, I could really be on to something!' There is no embalming scene in the short story. That was something I added, because I thought, 'Here's a great

opportunity to explore what goes on behind those dark curtains at all the funeral homes you drive by.' You know, it's a common experience: we're all going to die at one point, and we're going to be embalmed or cremated or what have you, so you kind of want to know, 'What's going to happen to me?' That was part of my interest, bringing that to the fore.

"It was difficult to get information about the funeral industry," Stopkewich added, "but even more so it was almost impossible to get any information on necrophilia. I tried to find as much as I could in the time that I had, but aside from maybe a textbook definition in the back of a medical text, there's not a lot of information out there. We just decided to stick with the story, follow that as much as possible and project maybe what we thought. But it's not based on any factual information at all. Since then, people E-mail me constantly, saying, 'Oh, I read about this guy in New Jersey who was arrested for fondling a corpse.' People

have been sending me articles and short stories and different references, you name it."

Surprisingly, once Stopkewich abandoned her old script for **KISSED**, she had little trouble getting others to sign on to the production, even though the subject might seem to be the kind that might make potential cast and crew shy away. "I thought it would; I thought it might, initially," she admitted. "Most of the people who worked on the film had never worked on a feature before, and the way we attracted the cast and crew was really through the screenplay. A lot of them read the script without knowing what it was about; we kind of liked the idea of just handing it over and letting them discover it for themselves. To me, that was almost the purest way to see the film. There's a couple of people who saw the film without knowing what it was about, and they were really freaked-out, because they got the full-on experience of being lulled and seduced by the film without having precon-

PHILIA

takes a light look at a dark subject.

ceived notions. That's really how we got people on to the film. They really thought it was a poetic, lyrical approach to the character, and they thought it was intelligently written and had a strong female lead.

"In fact, we had actors crashing our audition," she continued. "In Vancouver, we have a film industry, but for the most part it's a service industry for American productions, which are largely MOWs and TV series. Canadian actors very rarely get an opportunity to get a meaty part, especially for women. When some of the sides went out to some of the agents, a lot of them said, 'I'm not going to forward this to my client.' But a lot of these actors found out through friends, and then they would literally show up and say, 'I know I shouldn't be doing this, but I really want a lead, so would you see me?' The woman who was the casting director is the assistant casting director on *THE X-FILES*, and she said she'd never seen this before in her life. So they liked the material; that's what got people on it. At the same time, there were a few freaks on the crew, a couple of transients, but otherwise people were really attracted to the project because of the material."

As a debut director, Stopkewich found the job of getting her script off the page and onto the screen "was a big surprise, because there were a lot of people sort of learning how to make films on the set, so it was like film school for a lot of people. It was really a great collaboration for me with the actors. I was open to changing dialogue, if we thought we should do that at the moment. Of course, when you're shooting on the budget that we have, you're flying by the seat of your pants. So I threw caution to the wind; I just thought, 'I can really be stressed out about this, but ultimately it should be a lot of fun,' so I went for the gusto."

One of the biggest challenges of course was portraying the actual act of necrophilia. Though neither pornographic nor even gratuitously lurid, the film does not shy away from showing the audience what is happening. "When we got to that scene, both Molly and I were terrified, because we didn't know exactly what was going to happen," said Stopkewich. "It was difficult, because at that point I don't think she had even done



Sandra, (Molly Parker) and Matt, her boyfriend (Peter Outerbridge). Sandra's unusual sexual preferences make for some rather odd moments in their relationship.

an on-screen kiss, and here we were asking her to take all her clothes off and climb up on a guy—a dead guy—and make it look authentic. When I spoke to her about the part, she was really excited and gung-ho. I said, 'I'm sure there's going to be some difficult moments, but if you're willing to go there, I will go there with you.' So we were in sync in a big way.

"We prepared and talked about the character a lot beforehand, so when we got to the set and all hell was breaking loose, we could just look across the room and we knew where we were at in terms of the character and where we were going with the scene. It was the only scene in the whole film which I had storyboarded, a month in advance, and we actually shot it exactly as I had storyboarded it. Part of the reason for that was, as I said, that we were so freaked-out that we just stuck to the plan. We had a

closed set, and she insisted that the guy playing the corpse be a friend of hers so she would feel comfortable. We had music just blaring while she was spinning around the room, to help her lose herself in the moment. That scene took 16 or 18 hours of shooting. The whole crew was in another room, listening in on a walkie-talkie. In order to cut through some of the uncomfortableness, I would just be cracking jokes, with really dark humor, on the walkie-talkie, so the crew was in the other room, saying, 'What is going on in there?'"

This obviously isn't the sort of situation for which a film school education prepares aspiring directors. Stopkewich called the experience an education: "In film school, all the actors I worked with were non-professional; this is really the first time I worked with professionals," she said. "The biggest thing I realized about directing was that, as long as you have a clear idea where you're going and you have the ability to communicate with people, you can pretty much do anything, and you can have a lot of fun in the process. It's just a matter of knowing what you want and believing that the decisions you're making are right."

In this case, "believing" in the rightness of her decisions was more fact than metaphor for the director, because during filming she didn't have the common benefit of viewing rushes to verify her handling of these key sequences. "It was really difficult, because when we shot the film, we couldn't afford rushes," she said. "In the first week of shooting, we processed a couple of rolls to make sure the camera wasn't malfunctioning; otherwise, we were shooting in the dark. I only got to see the material two months later. I got these big boxes and started rifling through them to find specific reels, with certain scenes. My partner said, 'When you make a film, if you have five really interesting scenes, then you have a feature.' In my mind I felt that there were a few key scenes that, if the material wasn't there, I was basically going to be cutting together a short film! Luckily, the material was there, and it worked out."

There is an unexpected spiritual element to these necrophile scenes: the character believe that she is helping dead souls make the transition to the other side—which the film

conveys by having her bathed in white light. Is this experience supposed to be literally true, or is it happening only in her own mind? "I don't know," admitted Stopkewich. "This is something that comes from the short story. She describes that when she makes love she feels this energy: this is part of her philosophy of death and life; part of what her attraction is about is feeling this energy. She says she felt like she 'looked into the center' and was blinded by white light. Basically, I took that and riffed on it in a cinematic way and literally made it white light. Part of the reason for that is that the ultimate sexual experience is about transcendence and about losing yourself. In fact, the French call an orgasm *le petite moiré*, which is 'the little death'—which I think is really funny and ironic in this scenario. So I think part of it is about her getting to the place where she can lose herself and go beyond, in a way, so what I was trying to do was find some sort of cinematic equivalent to that."

Stopkewich added, "When I shot the film and when I edited it, especially, I wondered, 'What is the audience going to think at this point? If I was someone watching the film, how would I feel here? Would I still care about her? Would I be walking out at this point?' I liked the idea of the white light, because I thought, 'If I have it at really critical moments where people might be walking out, then the theatre will be filled with bright light and you'll be able to see who's leaving—so they'll feel really embarrassed!' It's like, 'You can run but you can't hide!' That's why the credits are over white as well—because I liked the idea that the theatre's filled with light. But, really, that whole spiritual element is the philosophy of the character, based on the short story; I just tried to find some cinematic representation of it."

Another surprising aspect of these scenes is that they don't force the audience into the voyeuristic position one would expect. Whereas voyeurism implies a separation between observer and observed, the film wants to achieve a closer kind of identification. The short story was written in the first-person, and one of the film's strengths is that it maintains the point-of-view of its unusual protagonist, showing us events through her eyes. Consequently, she ends up coming across as normal to the audience, because she sees herself as normal. Stopkewich explained, "I just thought, with this film, if I could create a character who was sympathetic as a necrophile, then people would have to kind of re-evaluate—or potentially

“At really critical moments, the theatre will be filled with bright light,” said Stopkewich. “You’ll be able to see who’s leaving—so they’ll feel really embarrassed!”



Director/co-writer Lynne Stopkewich (l) and Molly Parker. The two were very much in-sync—important in doing some of the challenging scenes involved.

re-evaluate—their moral stance. I don't know if I changed anyone's mind about necrophilia, and I don't think that's really what the purpose of the film is, but I like the idea that someone might come in, saying, 'No way, no way!' and then walk about saying, 'I like her!' I like that contrast."

Meanwhile, Matt, the unfortunate medical student who becomes her would-be boyfriend, starts off intrigued by her condition but soon himself becomes a kind of freak, trying to transform himself to fit into her fantasy. "I love that," said Stopkewich. "The funniest thing for me is the scene where he tries to get her to make love to him the way she makes love to the corpses, and he asks her to get on top of him, and at one point she goes, 'No, it's weird!' You're watching the film, thinking, 'Yeah, it's weird.' Then you think, 'No, wait a minute—she's weird!' I really like that. To me, my whole attraction to filmmaking has been trying to take people somewhere they haven't been before; at least, that's the kind of films I like. I like films that are intelligent and have a sense of humor, and don't necessarily take themselves completely seriously but allow you to engage with characters and care about characters."

Despite this strangeness, *KISSED*—unlike *NECROMANTIC*, the only other cinematic treatment of necrophilia that comes immediately to mind—never descends into being a mere freak show, rubbing the audience's noses in gruesome details. In fact, its greatest strength probably proceeds from the

fact that the character emerges as someone audiences can understand and even like. "That to me is the subversive thing about the film," said Stopkewich. "I like the idea that you care about this character, because if you didn't, then I'm not really taking the audience anywhere, since they're always going to remain distant from it and remain in a critical position, rather than losing themselves in it and maybe seeing something from another character's standpoint—where maybe it's not as black-and-white, but with shades of grey. That really heartens me about the film; I like that element of it."

The *Los Angeles Times* wrote this about *KISSED*: "A young woman's secret obsession, stemming from her initiation into the world of undertakers, blossoms when she meets a medical student. Canadian newcomer Lynne Stopkewich co-wrote and directed this offbeat love story." But that's not an altogether accurate description: Sandra's obsession predates her introduction to the world of undertakers by many years (in fact

its roots extend all the way back to her childhood), and it hardly blossoms upon meeting the medical student; if anything, her fetish comes into direct conflict with this new, "normal" relationship.

But most curious of all about the *Times*' description is its reticence to name the obsession in question: necrophilia. Although it is a newspaper's job to report the facts, not suppress them out of a sense of delicacy, perhaps the *Times* should not be blamed too excessively for its reticence. After all, the film's creator herself admitted to having a little trouble disclosing the premise.

"Of course, ultimately, we were trying to create the Disney version of a necrophile movie," Stopkewich concluded, with tongue at least slightly in cheek. "There's no way you can get around the n-word when describing this film, but to me the film is a love story; it's about love in general—her love for these dead guys and her whole relationship with Matt. Exploring those relationships were much more interesting than getting into the physical aspects of actual necrophilia. It's funny because I've had a lot of people, mostly men, ask me, 'So, how does she do it?' I say, 'Well, you didn't see the scene?' 'But he has this towel on the whole time.' There's a long pause, and I say, 'Well, it's not phalo-centric sex we're talking about.' Then there's a beat and they say, 'Ohhhh...!'"

It was challenging to walk that line, but I'm happy with the response that we've received so far." □

Death and sex without moral judgements

KISSED

A Boneyard Film Company production, in association with British Columbia Film, with the assistance of the Canada Council Media Arts, the National Film Board of Canada PAPFS Program and Telefilm Canada. Producers: Dean English and Lynne Stopkewich. Executive producer: John Pozer. Associate producer, Jessica Fraser. Director: Lynne Stopkewich. Director of photography, Gregory Middleton. Jim Denault. Editors: John Pozer, Peter Roeck & Stopkewich. Music: Don MacDonald. Production design: Eric McNab. Sound design: Marti Richa & Susan Taylor. Written by Michael Almereyda. 9/94, 95 mins.

Sandra Larson.....Molly Parker
Matt.....Peter Outerbridge
Mr. Wallis.....Jay Brazeau
Young Sandra.....Natasha Morley

by Steve Biodrowski

"I love the dead before they're cold, their bluing flesh for me to hold; cadaver eyes upon me see...nothing."—Alice Cooper

Appropriate as these lyrics from "I Love the Dead" may sound regarding the subject matter of *KISSED*, they are actually quoted more as a point of contrast than comparison—because the tone of the film is decidedly *not* one of campy horror. Instead, this is a surprisingly interesting, even intimate, look at a subject which few filmmakers would dare to approach. Rather like David Cronenberg's *CRASH*, this debut feature from Lynne Stopkewich—at first deceptive glance—appears to be a strange little film; closer observation, however, reveals that it is not so much a strange film as it is a straightforward film about a person with a strange sexual fascination. Also like *CRASH*, this film presents this predilection as a matter of fact, something that the audience must accept as a given, and observe closely throughout the course of the running time, despite whatever discomfort that might cause.

Having your debut effort compared to the work of David Cronenberg is probably more than Stopkewich herself would expect or want, and one should not push the comparison too far. This is especially true because the similarity is of a fairly superficial kind; on a deeper level, the two films are profoundly different in approaching their characters: whereas *CRASH* maintained a cold, cerebral distance, *KISSED* really wants you to empathize with its protagonist—whether in spite of or because of her penchant for necrophilia.

Clocking in at under 90 minutes, the film is fairly modest in its



In *KISSED*, Molly Parker stars as Sandra, a young woman whose fascination with death leads her to experiment with post-mortem sexual relations.

logistical ambitions, centering on a few select characters and a limited number of locations. Its ambition lies rather in what it hopes to achieve with its lead character, and in this regard it is completely successful. The major coup in *KISSED* is that it manages to present its story of necrophilia through the eyes of the necrophile. Whether or not one ultimately endorses the character's behavior, a viewer is put in the position of sharing her point-of-view for the length of the film. In essence, the film emerges as a daring character study who emerges not as a pervert but as a sympathetic human being.

Actress Molly Parker does a marvelous job of inhabiting the skin of someone we would normally be disposed to consider a freak. She is aided and abetted by Stopkewich's careful handling of the material, which presents the subject at face value, neither shying away from the unsavory aspects nor exploiting them for gratuitous shock value. Instead, the director navigates the difficult byways by always keeping her camera in sympathy with her lead

character.

This is not to be misconstrued as some kind of formal experiment in subjective cinema. For the most part, the film actually has a fairly naturalistic tone and style. Perhaps the only exception is the white light which envelops the character during her sexual acts with the dead. This is either a subjective moment of transcendence or an actual glimpse into the next work, depending on whether or not you take the protagonist's voice-over narration literally. In either case, it lends an unexpectedly uplifting spiritual element to a subject that could have simply wallowed in unpleasant necrosis.

Ultimately, *KISSED* is not a horror film in a conventional sense. It is not in the least concerned with the mechanics of suspense, nor does it view its action through horrified eyes. But in daring to take viewers into a place where most, if not all, would fear to go, by confronting the subject of death in this strange way edging into a spiritual approach to the subject, *KISSED* falls, even if somewhat marginally, into the realm of *cinéfantastique*. □

CRASH

A Fine Line Features release (in U.S.) of a Jeremy Thomas and Robert Lantos presentation of an Alliance Communications production in association with Telefilm Canada and the Movie Network. Producer, David Cronenberg. Executive producers, Lantos, Thomas. Director, David Cronenberg. Director of photography, Peter Suschitzky. Editor, Ronald Snaders. Music, Howard Shore. Production design, Carol Spier. Art direction, Tamara Deverell. Set Decoration, Elinor Rose Galbraith. Costumes, Denise Cronenberg. Sound (Dolby), David Lee. Stunt coordinator, Ten Hanlan. 5/96, 98 mins. Screenplay by Cronenberg, based on the novel by J.G. Ballard.

James Ballard.....James Spader
Helen Remington.....Holly Hunter
Vaughan.....Elias Koteas
Catherine Ballard.....Deborah Unger
Gabrielle.....Rosanna Arquette
Colin Seagrave.....Peter MacNeil

by Patricia Moir

One of the hallmarks of a good horror film is its tendency to provoke passionate disagreement among the general public and critics alike. George Romero's *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* prompted Robin Wood to celebrate the film's subversive subtext even as Roger Ebert penned his famous (and later retracted) *Reader's Digest* article denouncing its explicit violence and bleak cynicism. Tobe Hooper's *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE* outraged mainstream audiences but delighted younger viewers, while no less than Pauline Kael praised it for its transgressive originality. When David Cronenberg's first feature film, *SHIVERS*, became one of Canada's top-grossing movies in 1975, it actually inspired debate in the Canadian House of Commons, where certain members of Parliament took exception to the government's funding, through the Canadian Film Development Corporation, of such cinematic depravity.

Today, these films are rightly recognized as classics that transcend genre conventions to achieve the status of works of art. Their makers, however, have not always fulfilled their potential, often wasting their considerable talents on more conventional products. Cronenberg, on the other hand, has moved on to tackle ever more difficult projects, developing, in the process, a mature coherence of vision and a masterful technical grasp of his craft. *DEAD RINGERS* fully revealed his ability to create richly complex characterizations; *NAKED LUNCH* allowed him to transform William S. Burroughs' "unfilmable" beat novel into a metafictional study of the novelist's creative process; and M.

BUTTERFLY showed that Cronenberg is capable of presenting unembellished realities with a compassionate but critical eye. While so many of his fellow directors have been reduced to nostalgia, Cronenberg has resolutely focused his sights on the future and continued to delight and offend viewers with each new release.

His latest film, CRASH, is no exception. Based on the J. G. Ballard novel, the film has a deceptively simple and linear plot. A hip ad executive, James Ballard (Spader), and his wife, Catherine (Unger), engage in adulterous adventures, sharing the details with each other. The delicate balance of this relationship is disrupted when James is involved in car crash with Dr. Helen Remington (Hunter), injuring her and killing her husband. The immediate intimacy of their shared experience draws the two survivors into an intense sexual relationship. Their unconventional affair eventually brings Ballard to the enigmatic Vaughan (Koteas), a brilliant scientist who has given up his former occupation as a computer traffic-control specialist to explore the chaotic side of technology through the media of sex and car wrecks. Photographing accident sites, staging re-creations of celebrity auto fatalities, and presiding over an entourage of scarred, crippled crash survivors, Vaughan is the philosopher-guru of a subculture set apart by its collective experience of mortality. James finds himself driven to explore his new perception through repeated attempts to recreate the crash experience, both literally (in increasingly reckless bouts of joyriding) and metaphorically (in increasingly experimental sexual acts). In order to maintain the connection between them, Catherine must accompany him into the crash experience.

CRASH has inspired more critical debate than any other Cronenberg film to date. While there has been little disagreement over the film's technical excellence (visually, CRASH may be Cronenberg's most consistently beautiful film ever), no one seems to know exactly what to make of its content. In the Canadian press, Robert Hough of *Toronto Life* magazine expressed mild discomfort over his own enjoyment, noting that Cronenberg forces you "to look at the things that cause you pleasure;" and Liam Lacey, film critic for the *Toronto Globe*, called his Cannes viewing of CRASH "exhilarating...a professional epiphany" which shattered



The shared intimacy of an auto accident leads James Ballard (James Spader) and Helen Remington (Holly Hunter) into an intense sexual affair in CRASH.

his critical objectivity and forced him into an unexpected emotional engagement with Cronenberg's characters. Other North American reviewers have expressed totally conflicting opinions about the film's sexual explicitness, characterizing it as either intensely affecting or completely unerotic.

This lack of consensus is typical of the response to Cronenberg's oeuvre and raises intriguing questions about the nature of his artistic vision. The conventional critical position is that he is a "cool," intellectually detached filmmaker—an oversimplification which obscures what he is actually doing. Superficially, CRASH may seem to confirm Cronenberg's reputation as a clinical observer of events. The film is monochromatic, industrial blue-grey, its performances stylized and understated, and its pace, despite the realistic suddenness of its crash scenes, is leisurely, with none of the melodramatic editing and camera work common to conventional automobile action sequences. It is true that Cronenberg is "cool and detached," but only in the sense that he is never hysterical; when contemplating typically disturbing images, he has always maintained an attitude of unflinching fascination. His careful examination of the unsettling and often visceral aspects of human experience is, however, far from unfeeling. It is rigorous: when Cronenberg sets out to explore the transformations wrought by technology, disease, abuse, and addiction (or even the subjective experience of such "normal" transformations as pregnancy and sexual desire), he does so with an almost joyful sense of discovery, unimpeded by

social and political prejudice. In CRASH, Cronenberg forces us to look at the body as a fragile machine which is both threatened by and dependent upon technology, and to recognize our ambivalent relationship with our own imperfect flesh. That viewers have found this upsetting is less a comment on the psyche of the filmmaker than on our own unwillingness to confront material that explicitly portrays the queasy realities of physical existence without the expected editorial registration of disgust.

The label "intellectual" (as opposed to intelligent) is equally misleading, suggesting that Cronenberg is more interested in ideas than in experience. Nothing could be further from the truth, for Cronenberg's films respond honestly to the brutal, biological facts of human life. CRASH pulls no punches in its realistic depictions of physical damage and its effects on the human psyche. While the film definitely works on an extended, metaphorical level, examining the relationships that exist between mind, body, and technology, the metaphor arises out of the unavoidable physical facts of death and sexuality. Cronenberg doesn't intellectualize the body; in fact, he does the exact reverse, refusing to accept the comfortable illusion that the mind exists independent of the flesh.

The characters of CRASH are not a bunch of sado-masochistic creeps who get their kicks out of deformities, violent sex, and the thrill of self-destruction. They are human beings whose heightened awareness of mortality brings with it a heightened awareness of living, and whose altered psychologi-

cal outlook demands a new kind of self-expression. There are no rape scenes in CRASH, no beatings, no murders. The scenes between James and fellow crash survivor Gabrielle (Arquette), for example, have a quirky warmth to them. Negotiating around the braces and crutches which support her shattered body, James' actions are a combination of tenderness and sexual urgency. As bizarre as the sex may be, it is not only consensual but communicative; in accepting and learning to live with their "otherness," they have also had to find an alternative language in which to communicate. Likewise, James and Catherine, in the film's final scene, seem to move toward a strengthening of their former connection. In short, CRASH is much more than an intellectual exercise in social metaphor. It is also a portrait of people undergoing a very real kind of human experience, and it may even be a love story.

Cronenberg has described CRASH as "weirdly hopeful" (just as he called the victory of sexually transmitted parasites over humanity in SHIVERS "a happy ending"). To say that these statements run counter to prevailing social values is an understatement. Few films will admit that serious diseases or accidents are accompanied by permanent psychological changes, regardless of subsequently successful recoveries, and even fewer are willing to accept the fact that these changes might be positive. Cronenberg, however, has never subscribed to the romantic code which attaches moral labels to natural phenomena, and has proved equally resistant to the tendency to equate goodness with pleasantness. Even more than the explicit imagery of his films, it is this challenging of our moral certainties which has made Cronenberg such a controversial figure. The equation of death, violence, and sexual desire is a commonplace (witness the extraordinary popularity of novelist and screenwriter Anne Rice). The difference is that such commonplace exercises in romanticism—albeit a decadent romanticism—reinforce conventional concepts of good and evil; they may admit that evil is attractive, but the controlling mythology is essentially conservative. Cronenberg is one of the few directors to defy the received lore of the industrial age, combining 20th-century existential philosophy with a unique, post-industrial sensibility to create films that are subversive in the truest

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CRASH

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sense of the word. Audiences expect judgments, and what Cronenberg provides are descriptions. He deprives his audience of its familiar frame of reference, forcing each viewer to provide his or her own philosophical context. The resulting experience can only be subjective in the extreme, which helps to explain why Cronenberg's films have become increasingly resistant to description over the years.

For all these reasons, I can't really tell you whether you will enjoy CRASH. But I can say that you should see it—preferably twice and, to achieve maximum subjectivity, preferably alone. For, in the most profound sense, CRASH can only be what you make of it. □

INVASION AMERICA

continued from page 5

al horror. We want this show to have that same kind of feeling going through it."

Pair did not imply that eldritch creatures (H. P. Lovecraft's "Old Ones," for example) are involved. "For the first season," he explained, "we want people to wonder just what the hell is invading America! We just want them to know there are terrifying forces out there planning on taking over

the country."

Look for **INVASION AMERICA** to emerge from its camouflaged facility on Ventura Boulevard and establish a beachhead this fall. □

QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY

continued from page 7

vision. "Some of it will definitely have to go. Frankly, losing the biting off of the guy's nose makes production a lot simpler," Garris laughed. "Not seeing chunks of flesh falling certainly doesn't lessen the story in any way. You can keep the tension and horror of it."

"I don't foresee problems with Fox on this," Garris continues on the network's concern over questionable subject matter. This was the network that showed the most grotesque thing I've seen in my life on television—an X-FILES episode about a hillbilly family that was kind of pointlessly gruesome. It was like, 'Let's just see how pissed off we can make people!' That's Fox, and that'll be my example if they give me any trouble! Garris laughed. 'Excuse me, but aren't you the network that aired an episode of THE X-FILES about some hillbillies who cut the arms and legs off their mother and kept her under the bed and had

sex with her so she'd give birth to mutant children?'" Garris laughed and shuddered.

To make the \$4 million TV movie, Garris decided to carry over as many of his crew from THE SHINING as he could get for the 23-day February shoot. "For something like this that has to be cheap and fast," he noted, "you can't do better than have a crew that understands your shorthand. The whole show will probably shoot over the course of four weeks which, to me, is like a vacation after THE STAND and THE SHINING!"

Fox executives suggested shooting the film in their new Australian facilities—which housed their MUNSTERS Christmas TV movie last December, but Garris chose to stay in L.A.

"The difference between QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY and THE STAND or THE SHINING," said Garris, "is that this is more of a recreational horror. It's dark-humored and fun. It's not as rich and deep as the other shows. There is a texture to it, but it's not like delving into the mind of an alcoholic or the abuses of a family and all of those deeper themes. This movie really doesn't have time for that, and this movie doesn't want to do that. It just wants to play!" □

STEPHEN KING

continued from page 18

see, and new places to be. That's the great part of whatever the experience is—the creative act, or whatever. To find the world populated with people who don't really exist, and they don't lock you up for it. They give you money for it."

If there are any future TV projects, King said he would probably do them with the ABC-TV network. "I know everybody there, and they've done a great job for me. I don't have any problem with them. I think they are great. I probably should sound a little more grumpy because it would be a better bargaining position to be in, I guess. But...."

Stephen King shrugged and grinned—a very unscary shrug. □

20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

continued from page 51

ror when the crew find themselves trapped beneath millions of tons of ice. "They discover the ice goes on for hundreds of miles and they're going to run out of air," said Hardy. "So we created this whole sense of scraping along the bottom of the ice cap trying to find a way out. We're incorporating [images] shot under the Antarctic as our back plate materials. It's a great wonderland under there." □

LETTERS

STAR WARS REALITY CHECK

I must say I'm a little disappointed with my favorite magazine [STAR WARS, 28:8]. Leaving aside the flaws in reporting changes to the film that did not appear (the banthas, the chess game) and the not-to-be-reinstated Biggs reunion sequence which has, in fact, been reinstated, what bothers me most is the attitude of the reporting.

While the rest of the country seems nothing but excited about this release, the self-titled "magazine with a sense of wonder" couldn't seem to come up with much pleasant to say. Hardly an article went by without the cynical comment second-guessing Lucas' intentions and chalking it all up to greed or advertising for the next trilogy. You people are supposed to be the ones we go to when we're tired of mainstream magazines looking down their collective noses at genre films.

Lighten up. This is STAR WARS.

Greg David Craft
via e-mail

[*Actually, since the mainstream press seems to be gushing, we thought our coverage provided needed balance. We regret the errors in over coverage, but neither Lucasfilm nor 20th Century-Fox would provide information at press time, after repeated requests.*]

STAR WARS ON SUPER 8

Randall Larson errs in claiming STAR WARS has been available only on video in recent years. For the last five years it has been available on Super 8 anamorphic (Scope) stereo prints and last fall RETURN OF THE JEDI was released in Super 8 anamorphic, but mono.

Although video freaks may poo-poo the thought, well-made Regular 8 prints were of higher resolution than video, especially when projected on large screens. The STAR WARS prints, made by Rank Film Laboratories for England's Derann's Film Services, are of exceptionally high quality; only a side-by-side comparison would reveal they weren't 16mm, and unlike letterboxed video, can be projected up to 15-20 feet wide with no image deterioration. The stereo sound is from the two-track matrixed printmaster used for the stereo variable area optical tracks,

as well as can be decoded using a Dolby Pro Logic processor. Unfortunately, for some reason the deep low end for which the film is remembered was filtered out.

A number of other genre films are available in Super 8, in anamorphic where appropriate, and often in stereo, including ALIEN, ALIENS, ROBOCOP I and II, TERMINATOR I and II, many Hammer films, and all the recent Disney animated features including TOY STORY (but not NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS). They're not as cheap as video, of course but you get what you pay for.

Further information on what's available can be obtained from: Dave Thomas Films, RD 4, Box 130A, Greensburg, PA 15601

Rick Mitchell
Los Angeles, CA 90036

RECYCLING CONAN

The prospect of KULL, THE CONQUEROR [28:8:6], another film based on the works of Robert E. Howard fills me with not a little trepidation. ...

The most prominent problem is that of origins. Filmmakers seem to think that a fictional character such as Conan or Kull needs to be explained to get the audience, i.e. who he is, where he's from and how he got to be what he is today. Robert E. Howard was not overly concerned with such things and was at times downright cryptic about the origins of his heroes.

A case in point is Conan. Howard doesn't say all that much about young Conan except that he was the son of a blacksmith who was born on a battlefield. Howard, in a letter to one of his fans, talks about Conan being a full-blooded warrior by the age of 15. Conan is said by Howard to be 17 when the events in "The Tower of the Elephant" take place, this short story being the first appearance of him within the chronology of the stories.

When the film CONAN THE BARBARIAN was made, its makers were obviously dissatisfied with Howard's background for Conan and they decided to create one themselves. This origin of Conan that they made up was, to say the least, utterly divergent from anything implied or expressly stated by Howard. The only thing left of Howard in CONAN THE BARBARIAN were a few names of characters and bits of plotlines

filched from various Conan stories. While CONAN THE BARBARIAN had some interesting sets, costumes and props, it was overall a huge disappointment to fans of Robert E. Howard.

With this in mind it is difficult to work up much enthusiasm for the upcoming KULL, THE CONQUEROR. Everything in Jones' article indicates that once again the writings of Robert E. Howard will be cast by the wayside in favor of a recycled Conan script.

Finally, Kull is not Conan's father. Conan lived in the Hyborian Age over 3,000 years after the cataclysm that sank Kull's homeland of Atlantis beneath the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Howard strongly implies that Conan was perhaps a descendant of Kull, but certainly not his son.

David A. Lathrap
San Diego, CA 92122

WHITHER BABYLON 5

I have been waiting patiently for your promised issue on BABYLON 5 for a couple of years now. I figured after the show won the Hugo award for best dramatic presentation last year, you would finally have produced the issue, but nothing has appeared. If I were suspicious, I would begin to think you have become a stooge for STAR TREK: THE CORPORATION, as over the years, when they burp over at that group you have been on it like white on rice. I still have, and treasure, the two issues you did on BABYLON 5 years ago on the pilot and first season production. I was hoping you would have continued in the direction that you started, especially with a yearly wrap-up of each season's shows, like you do for STAR TREK. What gives?

John Bullard
via e-mail

[*Our double issue coverage of BABYLON 5, including an annotated episode guide to all four seasons will appear later this year.*]

CORRECTION

Our one page preview of SPACE TRUCKERS in the February issue 28:8:7 incorrectly credited the film's special visual effects. As our 12 page cover story in April [28:10] correctly reported, they are the work of London's Electric Image. We regret our error.

DEAN KOONTZ

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"Research is like play to me, but it doesn't always fit into what I'm working on. But I wouldn't give up the research for anything. I learned about synesthetic [a mixing up of the senses, when a sound becomes a visual, etc.] and used it in *Intensity*."

McGinley, the actor who plays the psychopath, looks as mild in person as his on-screen persona looks menacing. He noted he likes the fact that his killer character is not a stereotype. "Instead of being a stuttering, drooling person abused by his parents, he's just a guy." McGinley prepared for the part from both the novel and the screenplay—which was written by Stephen Tolkin. "It was rich ground to pick from."

It's a good thing Koontz found his niche in the world of writing, regardless of the title hooked on him. His wife, Gerda, made him an offer when he first started trying to make a living writing years ago. She said, "I'll support you for five years. And if you can't make it as a writer in that time, you'll never make it." By the end of that time period, she had quit her job to run the business end of her husband's career. Now, Koontz noted, she probably wishes she hadn't, because "she works more hours a week with this job than before."

And, like her husband, her time is spent immersed in the dark world of psychos who just can't seem to get the knack of rehabilitation. □

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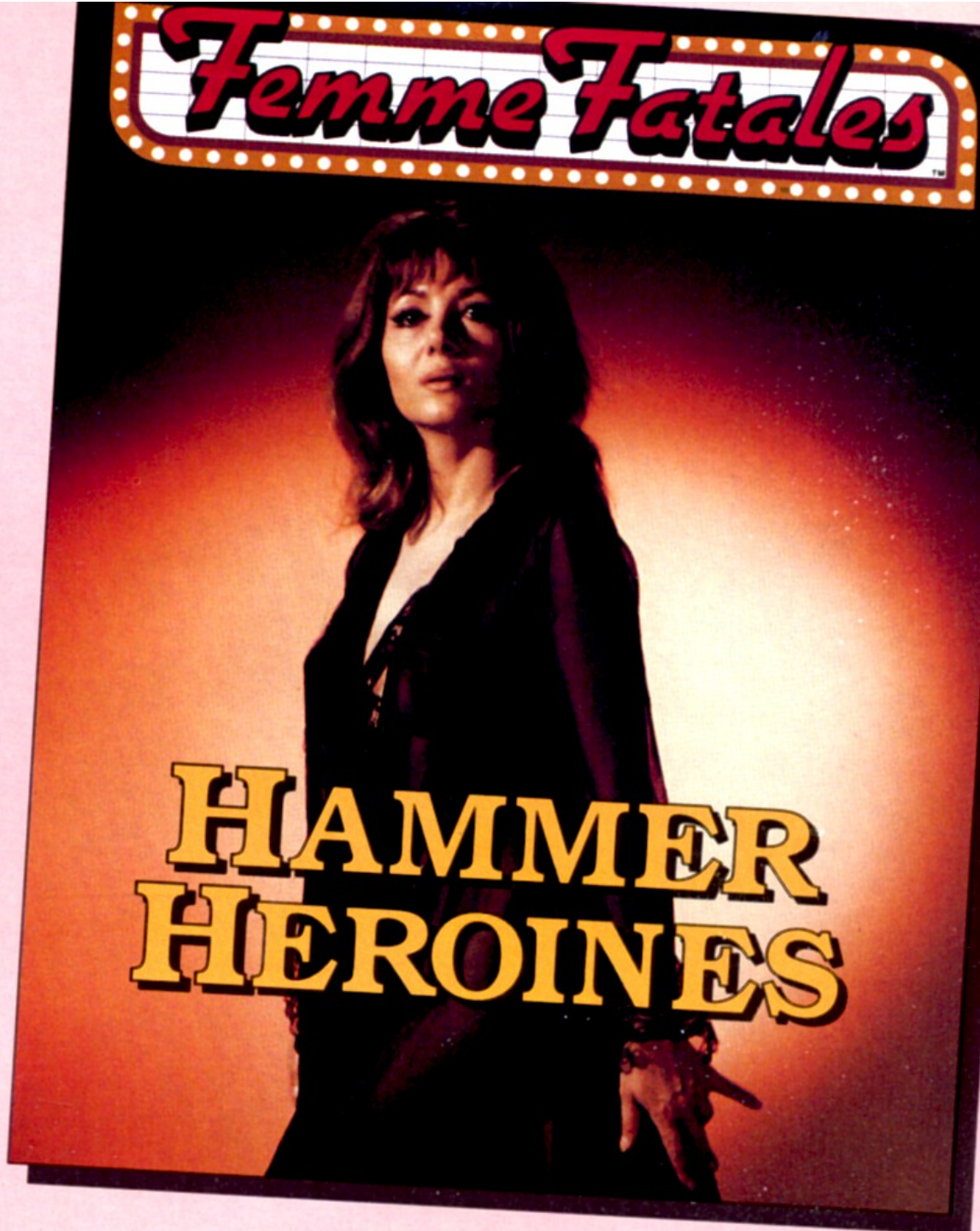
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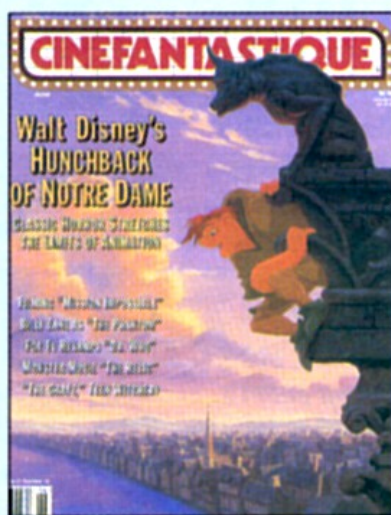
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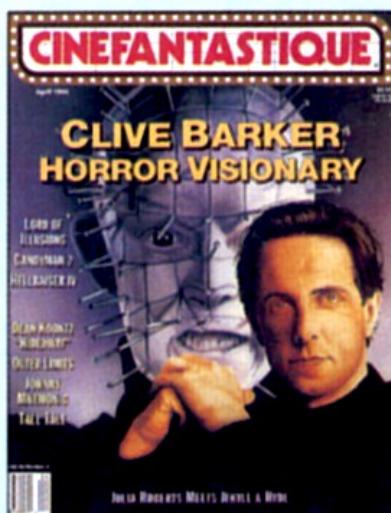
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